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ABSTRACT

One of a series of workplace education modules, this module includes activities and exercises for improving writing skills in the workplace. First, discussions of writing in the workplace are presented, highlighting tips for effective instruction, and of issues related to grading papers, including a sample evaluation form. Next, the assessment process in writing is described, including the use of pre/post writing samples, multiple drafts, portfolios, and grammar corrections; quotations from authors on the writing process are presented for use in stimulating thought and discussion; and the difficulty levels of module activities are defined (i.e., beginning, intermediate, and advanced). The bulk of the report then provides 44 activities in the following 7 topic areas: (1) overcoming anxieties; (2) understanding the purpose of writing; (3) understanding audience; (4) the POWER approach to writing: planning, organizing, writing, evaluating, and revising; (5) grammar; (6) writing for special purposes, including the use of comparison/contrast paragraphs and peer and self-evaluations; and (7) writing with computers. Each activity includes a description of intended learning goals, the difficulty level, the recommended group size, the time needed, and necessary materials. (HAA)

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ED 405 019

Write Ideas

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Strategies for Improving Writing Skills in the Workplace

By
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EPIC Workplace Learning Project, 1995

US Department of Education

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WRITING OVERVIEW

Most adults who choose to take a workplace writing class do so for two reasons: They don't know how to write, and they're afraid to try. It's important to stress that--even for professional writers--good writing doesn't just happen. No magic formula exists for making the process quick and simple. In fact, as learners become better writers, they don't necessarily find it easier or that they're writing faster. As they improve, their personal expectations also increase, and they're challenged to be more concise, more vivid, more dynamic. Ultimately, writing improves with practice. Learning strategies and techniques help, but practice, coupled with insightful feedback, remains the key to making true gains.

The instructors using this book should be aware of the contributors' benchmarks, which follow:

- *Writing is a process.* While experienced writers can often freewrite effectively and engagingly, they also know that if they polish their work into second, third, or fourth drafts, their work will be considerably stronger.

- *Understanding the audience and purpose of a particular piece is half the writing task.* Once these are established, it is much easier for the writer to determine appropriate content, organization, tone, and style.

- *Emerging writers benefit from a clear structure to follow when writing.* They will not automatically understand the value of articulate topic sentences, vivid primary and secondary support, or smooth transitions without being shown.

- *The more practical the writing task, the more the learner will understand and remember.* Ideally, learners should choose writing tasks that they are actually facing at work. When this isn't possible, they should choose tasks that have meaning for them.

- *Learners should build their skills to critique their work and the work of others.* This skill goes beyond the obvious need to proofread and encompasses evaluating for content, support, organization, tone, and style.

- *Teaching grammatical concepts must be integrated into the writing task.* While it may be useful to teach isolated skills at times, even this should be done in the context of the learners' own work whenever possible.

- *Learners should be practicing as they are learning.* At each step, instructors should introduce the concept or skill, demonstrate it, and have the students practice it as a class. When learners feel comfortable, they should practice individually. It will take longer to cover the material, but what is taught will more likely be learned.

- *Learning to be a good writer comes from reading the work of good writers.* As much as possible, instructors should read a wide variety of authors to their learners, use examples

from articulate writers to illustrate concepts, and encourage learners to read on their own and observe what makes one writer more effective or enjoyable than another.

Above all, instructors should share with learners their own pilgrimages in writing: the multiple drafts, the frustrations, the triumphs, and--most certainly--the satisfaction. We hope you find the following activities helpful and the experience of teaching rewarding.

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MARKING PAPERS

One of the most time-consuming--and challenging--tasks of a writing teacher is to mark papers and assign grades. Since grades are rarely given in workplace education programs, at least part of the burden is removed. Some instructors may see this as an excuse not to thoroughly review each paper, but, in fact, all the more attention should be paid to each student's efforts and results since the traditional criterion of grades to judge the success of a paper is gone. In marking papers, instructors should evaluate and guide for both grammatical and structural errors. To encourage learners to work at understanding and retaining new concepts, one effective method is to identify errors on the paper, but instead of correcting the mistakes, which is the traditional approach, the instructor should list the page number in the writing handbook or provide a handout to explain what is wrong and how to correct it. An additional step is to have the learner write the mistake as it is on the paper, write the explanation of why it's wrong, and rewrite the sentence correctly. This active participation in the correcting process produces two positive results. One, the learner begins to understand the grammatical concept, and two, the learner begins to understand how to use a handbook to prevent mistakes in the first place. Of the two skills, the latter is probably the more important, but it's one that's rarely taught.

An additional tool to use in the evaluation process is a form like the one below. By using a highlighter to identify skill levels of various concepts being taught, the instructor can quickly cover a lot of points for the learner, and the learner can easily see which skills are being mastered and which need more practice. This allows the instructor to write specific comments on each paper without having to repeat standard observations over and over.

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EVALUATION FORM

Wow! Wish I'd written it!

-structured solidly
-topic sentence contains both a narrowed topic and an arguable, focused target
-concluding sentence restates the main idea
-lively, interesting, varied vocabulary
-varied sentence structure with insightful content
-varied and smoothly-incorporated transitions
-strong sense of unity
-0 - 1 major sentence structure errors; 3 minor

Good work!

-structured well
-presence of narrowed and focused topic sentence
-concluding sentence restates the controlling idea
-strong and varied vocabulary
-appropriately varied sentence structure with interesting content
-sense of unity
-well-incorporated coherence devices
-1 - 2 major sentence structure errors; 4 minor

Looks like another revision would help

-evidence of structure
-attempt at topic sentence
-attempt at concluding sentence
-uninteresting vocabulary
-sense of unity
-attempt at sentence variety
-attempt at using transitions
-3 - 4 major sentence structure errors; 6 minor

Let's review the concepts again

-weak structure
-no clear topic
-no clear sense of conclusion
-repetitive or inappropriate vocabulary
-weak sentence variety
-no transitions
-awkward sentence structure
-4 or more major sentence structure errors; 8 or more minor

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THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS IN WRITING

Often, when teaching writing in the workplace, instructors have the good fortune of not having to assign grades. This allows them the luxury to use the assessment process in the way it was ideally designed: to give learners a sense of what they have mastered and what they still need to practice. As a result, the assessment can be an effective part of the learning process rather than the anxiety-producing threat that many learners have experienced in previous writing classes. Instructors and fellow learners should be actively involved in giving feedback at all stages of writing. It goes without saying that the feedback should be as immediate as possible, positive, and specific.

The following all have purpose and value in the assessment/evaluation process.

Pre/post-writing Sample:

For most learners this is the most dramatic method of convincing them they have learned something. Have learners write spontaneously on topics in both the first and the last classes. Structure each in the same way so that the same time is allotted, variety and level of writing topics are given, and resources are available. When finished, learners should be encouraged to make their own comparisons in terms of ease of writing and flow of ideas, as well as content, organization, development, and overall effectiveness. Instructors should also evaluate and compare the two samples.

Writing topics should be appropriate to the skill level of the learners. Instructors should give several topic choices that allow for various critical thinking skill levels. The topics should be general enough that even when learners have limited life experiences, they can write substantively while drawing on their own backgrounds.

Multiple Drafts:

There's no better way to teach that writing is a process than to expect learners to write multiple drafts. The progressive improvement of each draft helps students recognize what becomes easier and more polished and what still needs to be improved.

Portfolios:

When learners collect their work over a period of time, they are more likely to see their overall improvement. Portfolios may consist of a variety of polished pieces and/or multiple drafts and polished pieces. Ideally, a portfolio would also include examples of actual workplace documents written in class and the responses to the documents in the workplace. Again, learners, peers, and instructors should all contribute to assessing strengths and weaknesses of individual portfolios.

Grammar:

Traditionally, when grammar is assessed as a separate skill, learners are expected to correct errors in sentences written by someone else. This is arguably an effective assessment of proofreading skills; however, it may or may not accurately assess/reveal whether learners can generate their own error-free sentences. A better way to do this is to ask learners to write sentences in response to prompts such as the following:

1. Write a sentence using a colon.

2. Write a sentence that joins two independent clauses into a single sentence.

3. Write a sentence using a singular pronoun as the object of a preposition.

To vary this, choose the subject that learners should use in each sentence.

For example, use prompts such as the following:

1. Write a sentence with a dependent clause. Use *house* as the subject (or in the sentence).

Because this kind of assessment is new for most learners, instructors should give opportunities to practice with worksheets and should provide samples of correct responses.

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ADDING SOME SPICE

Frequently, a well-chosen quote will stick with learners more effectively than an instructor's detailed explanation. Use the following quotes to stimulate thought and discussion.

No matter how technical a subject, all writing is done for human beings by human beings.

--Jacqueline Berke

Writing isn't hard; no harder than ditch-digging.

--Patrick Dennis

Writers have two main problems: One is writer's block, when words won't come at all, and the other's logorrhea, when the words come so fast that they hardly get to the wastebasket in time.

--Cecilia Bartholomew

Not all writing must be concise. There is room for the grace note, the courteous phrase, the touch of oil that lets the gates of a sentence swing without squeaking.

--James Kilpatrick

I can't write five words but that I change seven.

--Dorothy Parker

Letters from graduate students, businessmen, some university presidents, and most of all from politicians are so barnacled with jargon that they bruise the wastebasket as they fall into it.

--Alistar Cooke

If you tell me something is a pleasure, I don't know whether it is more like revenge, or buttered toast, or success, or adoration, or relief from danger, or a good scratch.

--C. S. Lewis

Too many people think they are being creative when they are just being different.

--Noel Coward

While most fields of writing are judged by their best exemplars, it is science fiction's fate to be judged by its worst.

--Kingsley Amis

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In composing, as a general rule, run your pen through every other word you have written; you have no idea what vigor it will give to your style.

--Sydney Smith

Ninety-nine percent of pieces of writing fail in the first three sentences.

--Stephen K. Tollefson

Only amateurs say that they write for their own amusement. Writing is not an amusing occupation. It is a combination of ditch-digging, mountain-climbing, treadmill and childbirth. Writing may be interesting, absorbing, exhilarating, racking, relieving. But amusing? Never!

--Edna Ferber

What I like in a good author isn't what he says, but what he whispers.

--Logan Pearsall Smith

What you're trying to do when you write is to crowd the reader out of his own space and occupy it with yours, in a good cause. You're trying to take over his sensibility and deliver an experience that moves from mere information.

--Robert Stone

Let's face it, writing is hell.

--William Styron

Writing is fine therapy for people who are perpetually scared of nameless threats.

--William Styron

Writing saved me from the sin and inconvenience of violence.

--Alice Walker

Rage is the only quality which kept me, or anybody I have ever studied, writing columns for newspapers.

--Jimmy Breslin

Writing is a socially acceptable form of schizophrenia.

--E.L.Doctorow

Doctors bury their mistakes. Lawyers hang them. But journalists put theirs on the front page.

--Anonymous

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Journalism without a moral position is impossible. Every journalist is a moralist. It's absolutely unavoidable. A journalist is someone who looks at the world and the way it works, someone who takes a close look at things every day and reports what she sees, someone who represents the world, the event, for others. She cannot do her work without judging what she sees.

--Marguerite Duras

Now he is a statesman, when what he really wants is to be what most reporters are, adult delinquents.

--Peggy Noonan

Most rock journalism is people who can't write, interviewing people who can't talk, for people who can't read.

--Frank Zappa

No iron can pierce the heart with such force as a period put at just the right place.

--Isaac Babel

It's a damned poor mind indeed that can't think of at least two ways of spelling any word.

--Andrew Jackson

Punctuation marks are the road signs placed along the highway of our communication -- to control speeds, provide directions and prevent head-on collisions.

--Pico Iyer

Why do I avoid, as much as possible, using the semicolon? Let me be plain: the semicolon is ugly, ugly as a tick on a dog's belly. I pinch them out of my prose. The great German writer Arno Schmidt, punctuation-drunk, averages eleven to a page.

--Donald Barthelme

It is almost always a greater pleasure to come across a semicolon than a period. The period tells you that that is that; if you didn't get all the meaning you wanted or expected, anyway you got all the writer intended to parcel out and now you have to move along. But with a semicolon there you get a pleasant little feeling of expectancy; there is more to come; read on; it will get clearer.

--Lewis Thomas

Grammar, n. A system of pitfalls thoughtfully prepared for the feet of the self-made man, along the path by which he advances to distinction.

--Ambrose Bierce

The relative pronoun "which" can cause more trouble than any other word, if recklessly used. Foolhardy persons sometimes get lost in which-clauses and are never heard of again.

--James Thurber

The subject always agrees with the verb, except on those occasions when the subject does not agree.

--Gustave Flaubert

The difference between the right word and the nearly right word is the same as that between lightning and the lightning bug.

--Mark Twain

Words fascinate me. They always have. For me, browsing in a dictionary is like being turned loose in a bank.

--Eddie Cantor

A great many people think that polysyllables are a sign of intelligence.

--Barbara Walters

A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.

--William Strunk, Jr.

Trim sentences, like trim bodies, usually require far more effort than flabby ones.

--Clair Kehrwald Cook

There's almost no more beautiful sight than a simple declarative sentence.

--William Zinsser

The wastepaper basket is the writer's best friend.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

The difference between "isn't" and "ain't" is that the people who say "isn't" are in charge.

--Virginia Clark

An Eskimo carver selects a promising stone, studies it to see what figure it suggests, then chips away at it to free the desired form; you can approach your draft in much the same way.

--Clark Kehrwald Cook

Elizabeth Hardwick told me once that all her first drafts sounded as if a chicken had written them. So do mine for the most part.

--Flannery O'Connor

The beautiful part of writing is that you don't have to get it right the first time, unlike, say, a brain surgeon.

--Robert Cormier

A good title should be like a good metaphor: it should intrigue without being too baffling or too obvious.

--Walker Percy

There are days when the result is so bad that no fewer than five revisions are required. In contrast, when I'm greatly inspired, only four revisions are needed.

--John Kenneth Galbraith

Magazines all too frequently lead to books and should be regarded by the prudent as the heavy petting of literature.

--Fran Lebowitz

You should always believe all you read in the newspapers, as this makes them more interesting.

--Rose Macauley

I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear.

--Joan Didion

If you don't want to read it, nobody else is going to read it.

--S. E. Hinton

Good writing is essentially rewriting.

--Roald Dahl

. . . planning it. That's ninety percent of the work -- pacing the floor, thinking it out, the plot and the structure. The actual writing just takes two to three weeks. Writing it down for me is the easiest part.

--Woody Allen

I love being a writer. What I can't stand is the paperwork.

--Peter de Vries

Writers, editors, English teachers, unite! We have nothing to use but our brains! To arms! They shall not pass! Take no prisoners! Close enough is not good enough!

--Bruce O. Boston

Proofreading is like scrimshaw. It is getting to be a lost art.

--James J. Kilpatrick

DIFFICULTY LEVELS FOR WRITING MODULE:

- **Beginning level:** Learners at the beginning level have difficulty writing complete sentences. Typically, their work contains fragments, run-on sentences, and frequent awkward or misplaced phrases. They have little or no knowledge of formal grammar, or they are unable to apply what they know to their writing. Often, learners have a lot of anxiety about writing, to the extent that it may be difficult for them to write more than a few words at a time. This would be a common starting point for non-native speakers who have completed the ESL courses.

- **Intermediate level:** These learners can usually write complete sentences, although the sentences may have grammatical or mechanical errors. Their writing lacks organization and development at the sentence level and beyond. They may have some anxiety about writing, but they often are willing, even eager, to overcome this if given some encouragement. These learners need strategies for generating ideas and organizing them into well-developed papers. They have minimal skills in editing and revising their work into a polished piece.

- **Advanced level:** Advanced level writers are able to write with few grammatical or mechanical errors. They are able to organize and develop their ideas, although it may take them numerous false starts to do so. Their sentences may be somewhat cumbersome and full of inflated phrases. Often, they need help learning how to generate ideas, include sufficient secondary support, edit, and revise their work. They often have sophisticated questions about finding their own voice and adjusting their tone and style to fit the audience.

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OVERCOMING ANXIETIES

Few adults begin a writing class without knots in their stomachs. The questions tumble inside them: What if I can't learn? What if people read my writing and laugh? What if I'm asked to share my work with the rest of the class? To ease these fears, instructors should create a class environment that is comfortable and non-threatening. Allowing learners to make mistakes and correct their mistakes encourages them to stretch their skills. By sharing the why's and how's of their own failures and successes, instructors can help learners understand that becoming a good writer is a journey, not a magic moment.

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WRITING MAKES ME NERVOUS!

Learning Goals:

- To raise awareness of the learner's anxiety about writing
- To build an understanding that those anxieties can be reduced.
- To learn specific strategies to improve the writer's process and skills.

Level: ●

Group Size: Any

Time: 2-3 minutes per student

Preparation and Materials: None

Learning Activity:

Have each student share one or more experiences from one or both of the following prompts:

- Describe an unsuccessful writing experience. What did you learn from this experience?
- Describe a successful writing experience. What did you learn from this experience?

***Variations** Have students write on the prompt first, then share their experiences with the group. This exercise also works well as an icebreaker.

Remarks: The instructor should also share a writing experience, preferably one that was unsuccessful. Sharing such an experience helps students become aware that even accomplished writers are not always successful. This process gives learners the chance to hear other horror stories and realize they're not alone in their anxieties. Also, they often discover that not all bad experiences were the fault of the writer.

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WHY DO I WRITE?

Learning Goals:
- To help participants identify the writing tasks for which they are responsible

Level: •

Group size: Any

Time: 10-15 minutes

Preparation and Materials: None

Learning Activity:

Have students write or discuss the following:

***Discussion Questions**

1. What kinds of writing do you do at work?
2. Which ones are the hardest? Why?
3. What would make them easier?

Remarks: None

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UNDERSTANDING PURPOSE

Having a clear purpose makes the writing process considerably easier. Writers should have a general and a specific purpose when they write. General purposes would include the following: to persuade, to entertain, to inform, to explain, to call to action, and so forth. The specific purpose would be what the writer wants the reader to know, do, or believe when finished reading. For instance, an editorial would have the general purpose of trying to persuade readers; the more specific purpose would be to persuade readers to vote for a tax increase to fund a library addition. Writers might have overlapping purposes, and the purposes may be stated clearly or implied. If writers aren't clear what their purposes are, readers won't know either.

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WHAT IS THE WRITER'S PURPOSE?

Learning Goals:

- To understand the importance of knowing one's purpose in a writing task
- To identify reasons for writing

Level: ●■

Group Size: Any

Time: 30-40 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Examples of different forms of writing: memos, editorials, news articles, cartoons, instruction manuals, columns, textbooks, essays, advertisements, personal and business letters, etc.
What Is the Writer's Purpose?

Learning Activity:

Divide the class into small groups. Give each group the examples and have them fill out the worksheet. As a class, discuss their conclusions.

***Discussion Questions**

1. Which ones have the most straightforward purpose? How does this make it easier (or harder) for the reader?
2. Which ones don't seem to have a purpose? How does this make it easier (or harder) for the reader?

***Variations** Have students bring in examples they've found. Use the same small-group format and discuss.

Remarks: Choose a variety of examples, some with multiple purposes. Include examples that lack a clear purpose.

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What's the Writer's Purpose?

Example	Who is the writer?	What is the writer's purpose? (general and specific)	What tells you this?	In what ways does the writer succeed in his/her purpose?	In what ways does the writer fail in achieving his/her purpose?	What could be done to help the writer achieve his/her purpose?

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WHAT'S MY PURPOSE?

Learning Goals:

- To understand how identifying purpose makes writing easier
- To identify a specific purpose

Level: ●■

Group Size: Any

Time: 15 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Handout *What's My Purpose?*

Learning Activity:

As a class, walk through the worksheet using a common topic. Identify ways the worksheet would change depending on what the general and specific purposes would be. Have the students fill out the worksheet before writing their papers.

Remarks:

Most learners will automatically identify their purposes in writing. However, some students have trouble focusing in on a clear purpose; consequently, they tend to write general paragraphs that aren't worth reading. Try to help students find something about which they feel strongly. Encourage them to write letters to the company president or to the newspaper, even if they won't ever be sent. They'll find it much easier to write.

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WHAT'S MY PURPOSE?

1. What is my general purpose? (Am I trying to inform, persuade, entertain, etc.?)

2. What is my specific purpose? (What do I want the reader to know, do, or believe when finished reading this paper?)

3. Who is my audience? (Be specific!)

4. What will the reader need to know?

5. What will be the stumbling blocks to achieve my purpose?

6. How can I overcome these stumbling blocks?

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UNDERSTANDING AUDIENCE

Central to becoming a good writer is the awareness that all writing is done for someone to read. Jacqueline Berke points out the obvious when she states, "All writing is done for human beings by human beings." Yet writers so often seem to forget that a real person is out there who can be easily distracted or may not care about the subject enough to wade through jargon or fuzzy sentences. Skilled writers know the secret to good writing is this: Don't make the reader work. This ability requires attention to many elements, including the following:

- identifying who the audience is
- writing for the appropriate reading level
- shifting tone and style to match the reader
- avoiding inflated words and phrases
- using lively images
- keeping information clear and simple

As learners build an understanding of writing for the reader, they'll find that words come more easily and ideas flow more smoothly.

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WHO'S THE AUDIENCE?

Learning Goals:

- To identify the audience
- To analyze and critique different writing samples

Level:

Group Size: Any

Time: 20 - 30 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Overheads or handouts.

Learning Activity:

Give students three writing samples to evaluate. These samples may include legal documents, advertisements, articles, or company memos. Have students guess the intended audience.

*** Discussion Questions**

1. Who is the audience?
2. What is the material's level of difficulty?
3. What level of concentration will the sample require of the reader?
4. Is the level of difficulty and style appropriate to the audience?

*** Variations** Place company-wide memorandums on overhead. Have students identify the recipient of the memos. Have them explain what clues led them to guess that person.

Remarks: This activity helps build an awareness of the writer as a reader.

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WHAT'S THE WRITING CULTURE?

Learning Goals:

- To identify and analyze the culture of writing at participants' workplace
- To recognize that this culture changes from company to company and even within departments of a company
- To identify the kind and amount of writing participants do on their jobs

Level: ●

Group Size: Any

Time: 20-30 minutes

Preparation and Materials: None

Learning Activity:

Have the group discuss the writing culture in their workplace. Use the following questions as a starting point:

***Discussion Questions**

1. How is writing done? (Do some people write and some people revise?)
2. How much autonomy do you have?
3. What are the supervisors' expectations?
4. What is the attitude toward writing? (Is it considered an acknowledgment of skill or a drudgery job and therefore a punishment?)
5. How much weight will your writing have?
6. How does this vary within departments? How is this different or the same as at other companies?

Remarks:

If several different departments are represented in a class, it's easier for participants to recognize that some aspects of a company's writing culture may be company wide while others vary from department to department. Discussing the above questions should help students recognize when they

can or can't change the writing process at their company.

EPIC Workplace Learning Project, 1995
US Department of Education

SUPERVISOR VS. CO-WORKER

Learning Goals:

- To understand how content needs to change depending on the reader

Level: ■

Group Size: Any

Time: 30 minutes

Preparation and Materials: None

Learning Activity:

Discuss a situation where the students might have to write a message to a co-worker or a memo to a supervisor (i.e., machine break down, ran wrong product, need to order part, etc.). Have students write a memo to their supervisor and a note to a co-worker on the topic the class has chosen.

*** Discussion Questions**

1. Did the writer use different vocabulary in the two samples?
2. What information was included in each sample?
3. Discuss appropriate word choice for different audiences.

*** Variations**

The instructor may wish to have students complete the assignment and discuss the results in a subsequent class when you can distribute various samples. Another possibility is to have two different subjects for the memo/note: write one to a member of your household, one to a supervisor.

Remarks: This activity also works well in ESL environments.

EPIC Workplace Learning Project, 1995
US Department of Education

HOW TO WALK THROUGH A PIECE OF PAPER

Learning Goals:

- To build awareness that the writer must write for the reader
- To identify specific elements the writer can incorporate to make reading easier

Level: ●■

Group Size: 4 or more

Time: 20-30 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Handout *How to Walk through a Piece of Paper*, *Solution to the Paper Activity*
Scissors for each person

Learning Activity:

Have each student try to figure out the directions on the handout without any instructor clarification. Encourage them to work individually without help from anyone else. The intent is to build awareness that the reader shouldn't have to figure out what the writer is trying to say. In fact, the bottom line in writing well is: Don't make the reader work!

***Discussion Questions**

1. What would have helped you do this exercise better? What do you need as a reader?
2. If you were writing these instructions, what could you do to help the reader understand them better?
3. What problems do you encounter with other kinds of material?
4. What should you do to make the job easier for the reader?

Remarks: The group should come up with a list of specific suggestions including, but certainly not limited to, the following:

- Have a clear purpose

- Know your audience. What do they already know? What is their reading level?
- Organize your material so the reader can logically follow it
- Connect the new information to what the reader already knows
- Give clear, appropriate examples; illustrate where appropriate
- Write clear sentences
- Use appropriate punctuation
- Use vivid descriptive language
- Give visual clues (bullets, bold type, size, italics)

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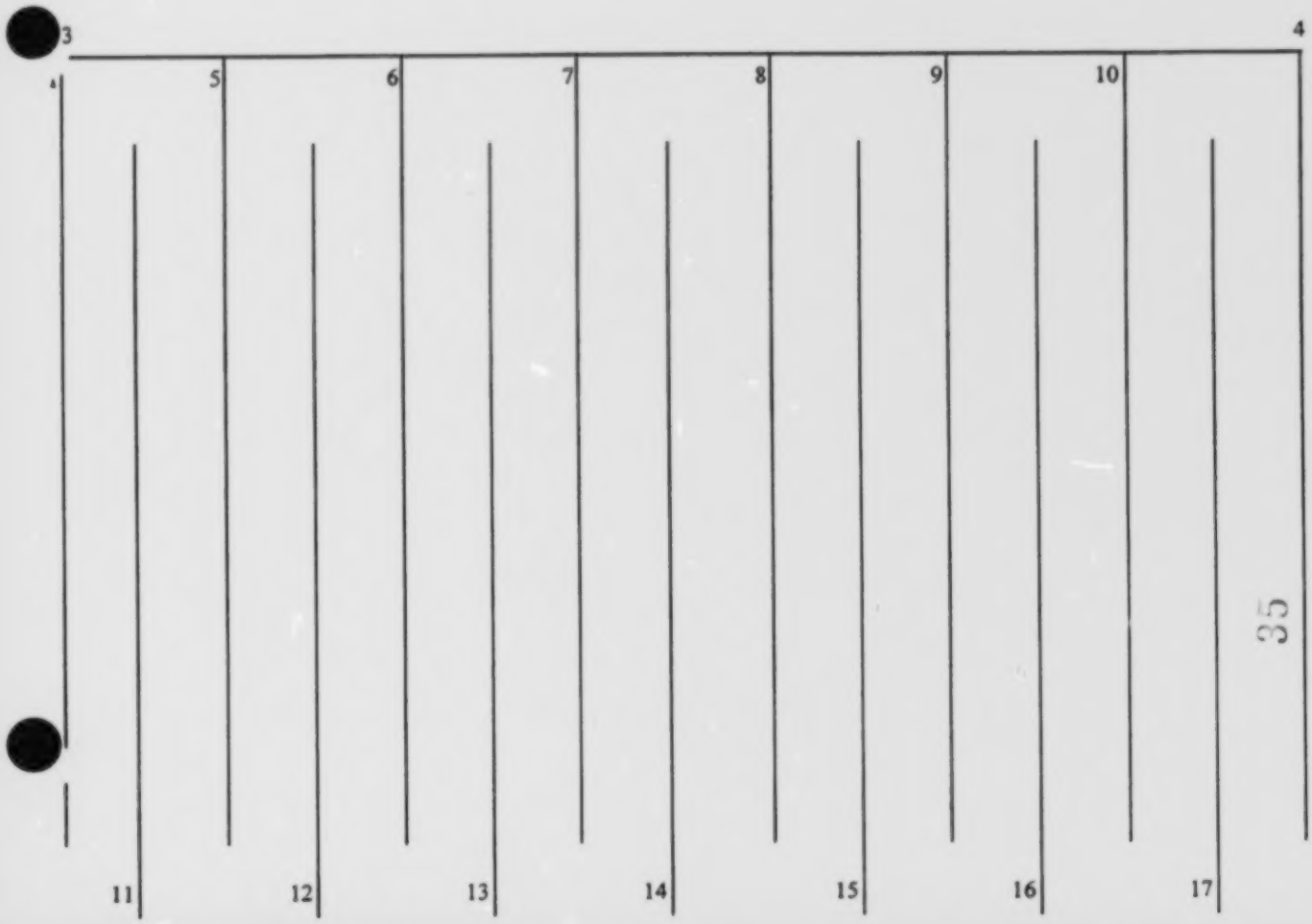
How to Walk Through a Piece of Paper

1. Fold the paper in half and cut both sides at the same time according to the diagram.
2. Start with cut #1, and then cut #2.
3. Next cut along the fold from #3 to #4. Then make the other cuts.

The larger the piece of paper and the smaller the spaces between the cuts, the bigger the "hole" will be and the more people can walk through it at the same time.



SOLUTION TO THE PAPER ACTIVITY

1. The end product of this exercise is one continuous piece of paper. To achieve this goal do not cut through the paper from one end to the other at any point.

2. Fold the paper in half horizontally. This fold will facilitate cutting both halves of the paper at the same time.

3. Starting with the folded side, cut along line 1 to within an inch of the paper's edge. Cut line 2 in the same way.

4. Next, cut along the fold from line 3 to line 4. DO NOT CUT THROUGH THESE NUMBERS TO THE EDGE OF THE PAPER.

5. Cut lines 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 in the same way you did lines 1 and 2. Remember, DO NOT CUT THROUGH to the edge.

6. Next, cut lines 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17. This time, start at the edge of the paper and cut to within an inch of the folded side of the paper.

7. At this point, the paper should be in one continuous piece and should be large enough for any adult to walk through.

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GUNNING FOG INDEX

Learning Goals:

- To learn to analyze strengths and weaknesses in others' writing
- To increase awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses
- To consider the impact strengths and weaknesses have on the reader

Level: ●■◆

Group Size: 4 or more participants

Time: 1 hour

Preparation and Materials: *Gunning Fog Index* or other readability measure
Four or five sample memos or letters from the company (all identifying characteristics should be disguised or deleted).
Secure permission to use the memos
OR create sample memos or letters.

Learning Activity:

Students may work alone, in pairs or in small groups. Give each student or group a writing sample. Then, explain how to use the readability measure, using one of the samples as an example. Ask the students to measure the readability on each sample and be prepared to discuss the following questions with the rest of the group.

***Discussion Questions**

1. What is the reading level of each sample? Does it match the intended audience?
2. What is effective in the sample?
3. What could be improved or strengthened?
4. Give a specific suggestion for how to improve the sample.

Remarks: Choose samples that have some obvious weaknesses. More advanced groups will discuss tone, style, organization and development more thoughtfully.

Beware! The Fog Index can be somewhat dangerous to use with novice writers. They may be tempted to use bigger words and longer sentences to make their writing seem more sophisticated. These actions don't necessarily make their writing clearer or more readable. Simple ideas can be written at an advanced level, and complicated ideas can--if the writer is very skillful--be written on a sixth-grade level. Most readers, even highly skilled ones, would prefer to read clear ideas on a simpler level than to concentrate and wade through long, jargon-filled sentences. Remind your writers of what they would prefer as readers!

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GUNNING FOG INDEX

Use this formula to find the level of difficulty of the material you're reading. This formula will also tell you at what level you are writing.

1. Select several 100-word passages from the material. Choose from the beginning, middle, and end of the material.

2. Determine the average number of words in a sentence by counting the number of sentences in each 100-word sample and dividing 100 by the number of sentences.

3. Count the number of words of three syllables or more. Do not count proper names, easy compound words such "grandmother," or forms in which the third syllable is merely an ending such as "directed."

4. Add the number of "hard" words (three syllables or more) to the average number of words in the sentence. Next, multiply this total by 0.4, which is the "fog index." Round off this number to get an approximate grade level for the material.

EXAMPLE:

a. first 100-word block has 6 sentences
second block has 6.5 sentences
third block has 5.5 sentences
TOTAL = 18 sentences

b. Divide 18 (the number of sentences) into 300 (the total number of words in the three passages). The answer, rounded to the .10, is **16.7**.

c. The three passages have an average of 10 "hard" words in each section.

16.7 (average number of words in a sentence)
+10.0
26.7

Multiply 26.7 by 0.4.

26.7
x .4
10.68

Result: The reading level is about tenth grade, seventh month.

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US Department of Education

SPECIALIZED LANGUAGE

Learning Goals:
- To recognize positive writing styles

Level: ■

Group Size: Any

Time: 30 minutes

Preparation and Materials: None

Learning Activity:

Give students several pieces of information. Have them compose two memoranda: one for a co-worker in their department; one for someone who's never been to the company. (For example, a topic might include hiring a new staff member or adding a new product to the line.) Write one memo for interdepartmental use and one for vendors.

• Discussion Questions

1. Is the content significantly different?
2. Identify specialized language used in the interdepartmental memorandum. How did you describe these concepts to the outsider?
3. Develop a list of specialized language terms commonly used in your department.

• Variations None

Remarks: This activity builds awareness of the specialized language used to communicate with other people outside of the company or department.

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NEW PRODUCT

Learning Goals:

- To decide what information needs to be presented to a particular audience
- To practice organizing information for a written piece

Level: ■

Group Size: Any

Time: 1 hour

Preparation and Materials: None

Learning Activity:

Have students use WWWWWH or any organizational method to come up with information about a new product the company has produced. Have students compose a memorandum to all personnel about the new product. Have them create an advertisement for the product.

• Discussion Questions

1. Did the students use different language when they created the memorandum and the advertisement?
2. What information does the customer need?
3. How does customer information differ from information required by employees?

• Variations

In a class where the computer is being used the students can practice various computer skills. They can experiment with fonts, point size, color, bold, italics, underline and graphics as they create their advertisements.

Remarks:

After this activity the students can create a list of synonyms used in the different pieces (e.g. in the memo the suitcase is *black*, in the advertisement it is *ebony*).

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WRITING WITH POWER

Novice writers tend to think that they should just start writing. They miss the most important steps of generating ideas and organizing them into a coherent paragraph or paper. By breaking down the writing process into manageable chunks, even inexperienced writers are able to write something meaningful. POWER writing is a systematic approach to the process that includes the following:

- **Planning**--Once the writer defines his or her audience and purpose, brainstorming is the next step. The more ideas a writer has, the more likely the writer will have a good idea. Learners should develop a variety of brainstorming techniques because no single technique will work for all writing tasks.
- **Organizing**--By organizing ideas, whether in a traditional outline or non-traditional web, learners can create a more logical flow to their papers. This gives them a head start in developing and transitioning between ideas.
- **Writing**--Meticulous organization lends itself to easy writing. If writers still suffer from writer's block, freewriting can sometimes unleash words and ideas.
- **Evaluating**--Most learners have difficulty skillfully analyzing and critiquing their writing or the writing of others. By having an opportunity to evaluate their peers' or instructor's writing, learners often develop a fresh perspective on their own strengths and weaknesses.
- **Revising**--Writing *is* a process. If a first draft is solid, a second draft--with a little time in between--generally makes it stronger and clearer. To be most effective, revising must be more than correcting grammatical errors; it must include improvements in development and organization.

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NARROWING THE TOPIC

Learning Goals:

- To recognize the importance of narrowing a topic

Level:

●

Group Size:

Any

Time:

30 minutes

Preparation and Materials:

A provocative poem, essay, editorial, or workplace document

Learning Activity:

Ask students to write for 5 minutes on a general topic such as prejudice, war, safety in the workplace, or right-sizing a company. Then, read the poem, essay, or document that graphically captures the topic. Have the group discuss the topic until ideas are flowing freely before moving on to the next step (10 minutes). Ask students to write for another 5 minutes on the topic.

***Discussion Questions**

1. Which prompt was easier to write about? Why?
2. In what ways is your writing clearer and stronger in the second prompt than in the first? What made the difference?

Remarks:

The focus of this activity is on building awareness of how important it is to narrow the topic and to stimulate thinking. Choosing a topic and essay or document that's appropriate to the group is challenging but critical to the success of this activity. For a broad topic such as war, the children's book *The Wall* by Eve Bunting is an excellent discussion starter. In a workplace setting, find an editorial, newspaper article, or memo that presents the issue in a forceful, graphic way.

References:

Bunting, Eve. *The Wall*. New York: Clarion Books, 1990, pp. 32.

F.A.S.T. BRAINSTORMING

Learning Goals:
- To build skills in generating ideas for a topic
- To learn the F.A.S.T. brainstorming system

Level: ●

Group Size: 4 or more participants

Time: 20-30 minutes

Preparation and Materials: None

Learning Activity:

Choose a specific topic for the entire class to brainstorm for ideas. Each student should also choose another topic to brainstorm. Students will be expected to turn their ideas into polished pieces eventually.

Begin by demonstrating what kinds of questions the writer can ask to generate writing ideas. Instructors should include their own ideas. Practice brainstorming as a group for several minutes on the class topic. Then, have students brainstorm individually on their own topics for 5 minutes.

The F.A.S.T. System (Topic: Recognizing employee efforts)

Feelings-- What feelings do participants have when they are recognized for having done well? How do they feel when they're not recognized? How does it feel when others are singled out and praised? When participants are recognized and rewarded, does the workplace atmosphere improve or decline?

Alternate Viewpoints--What are problems associated with recognizing employee efforts? When has recognition backfired? Why would management not like doing it? What is the expense involved? The time?

Senses--What have participants seen, touched, tasted, heard, and smelled when they have been rewarded? What does recognition sound like? What does it look like?

Time--How were people recognized 10 years ago? 50 years ago? What worked then and why? How will they be recognized 10 years from now? 50 years from now? What changes should the company be making now to recognize people's efforts more effectively?

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Remarks:

Not every topic lends itself well to these kinds of questions. However, the F.A.S.T. system usually raises some new and interesting perspectives. As much as possible, encourage free-flowing ideas. The more ideas individuals have, the broader the understanding of the topic; therefore, they will have something worthwhile to write. Always go for quantity; don't worry about quality at this point.

References:

Steele, Gary G. *Shortcuts to Basic Writing Skills.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1981, pp. 137-139.

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US Department of Education

THINKING CRITICALLY TO BRAINSTORM

Learning Goals:

- To encourage learners to draw on their life experiences in writing
- To build critical thinking skills in order to add substance to learners' written work

Level: ■◆

Group Size: Any

Time: 20 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Handout *Quotation Sheet*

Learning Activity:

As a group, choose one of the quotations and brainstorm together. Guide students to draw on their own personal experiences to illustrate and support the quotation. Use brainstorming techniques learned in previous classes to build ideas.

***Discussion Questions**

1. In what ways is the quotation true or not true?
2. What life experiences have you had that illustrate or refute this quotation?
3. If you were trying to teach a child that this quotation is true and important to remember in life, what story would you tell to convince him or her?
4. Why has this quotation endured? What is it about the choice or arrangement of words that has made it a quote?

***Variations**

Learners may work independently or in pairs, each writing on a different quotation. This works better with learners who already are fairly good critical thinkers. Less able individuals will be frustrated with the process

Remarks:

The most difficult part of this activity is narrowing the list of quotations to offer. Learners also enjoy bringing in their favorites.

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Quotation Sheet

- It takes a village to raise a child.

  --African Proverb

- It is never too late to be what you might have been.

  --George Elliot

- What we anticipate seldom occurs; what we least expect generally happens.

  --Benjamin Disraeli

- Eighty percent of success is showing up.

  --Woody Allen

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WRITING WITH MUSIC

Learning Goals:

- To stimulate creative thinking
- To examine best environments for writing

Level:

-

Group Size:

2 or more students

Time:

20 - 30 minutes

Preparation and Materials:

A variety of music (CD or tape)
CD or tape player

Learning Activity:

Choose a variety of music for students' listening pleasure; the more diverse the selections are the better (e.g. classical, jazz, hard rock, new age, disco, reggae, etc.). Have students write about the first thing that comes to mind when they hear this music. Use three or more selections. Have students share their writing samples with the class.

*** Discussion Questions**

1. Why is creativity important in writing?
2. What environments are most conducive to creative thinking?
3. What place does creativity have in business writing?

*** Variations**

Play music while students are working on a particular writing assignment.

Remarks:

This assignment is especially useful for stimulating the right brain. It is a good exercise for different learning styles (auditory, kinesthetic). Music might distract some students.

References:

4MAT Learning Styles.

Kolb, David, and Donna M. Smith. *User's Guide for the Learning-Style Inventory.* McBer & Company, 1986.

WEBBING OR CLUSTERING

Learning Goals: • To generate writing ideas by webbing

Level: •

Group size: Any

Time: 5-15 minutes

Preparation and Materials: None

Learning Activity:

Webbing, or clustering as it is sometimes called, is a free-flowing way to generate ideas. You begin with the main idea in the center of the page and let one idea trigger the next in random fashion. (See example.)

***Variations** This can also double as a way to organize ideas.

Remarks: Not everyone likes this method of brainstorming, but some people immediately latch onto it because it fits their style of thinking so well. Encourage everyone to at least try it. Even the skeptics may have fun with it and learn to use it.

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HERRINGBONE

Learning Goals:
- To generate writing ideas
- To organize ideas

Level: ●

Group size: Any

Time: 5-15 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Handout *Herringbone*

Learning Activity:

The herringbone method of brainstorming works well for certain kinds of writing. Have students choose a topic and fill in as much information as possible. This is an especially helpful method for writers who have trouble remembering to include obvious details.

***Variations** This can also work as a way to organize ideas.

Remarks: Remind participants that this is just one more tool in their writing kits for brainstorming. It won't fit every writing task, but it will be perfectly suited to others.

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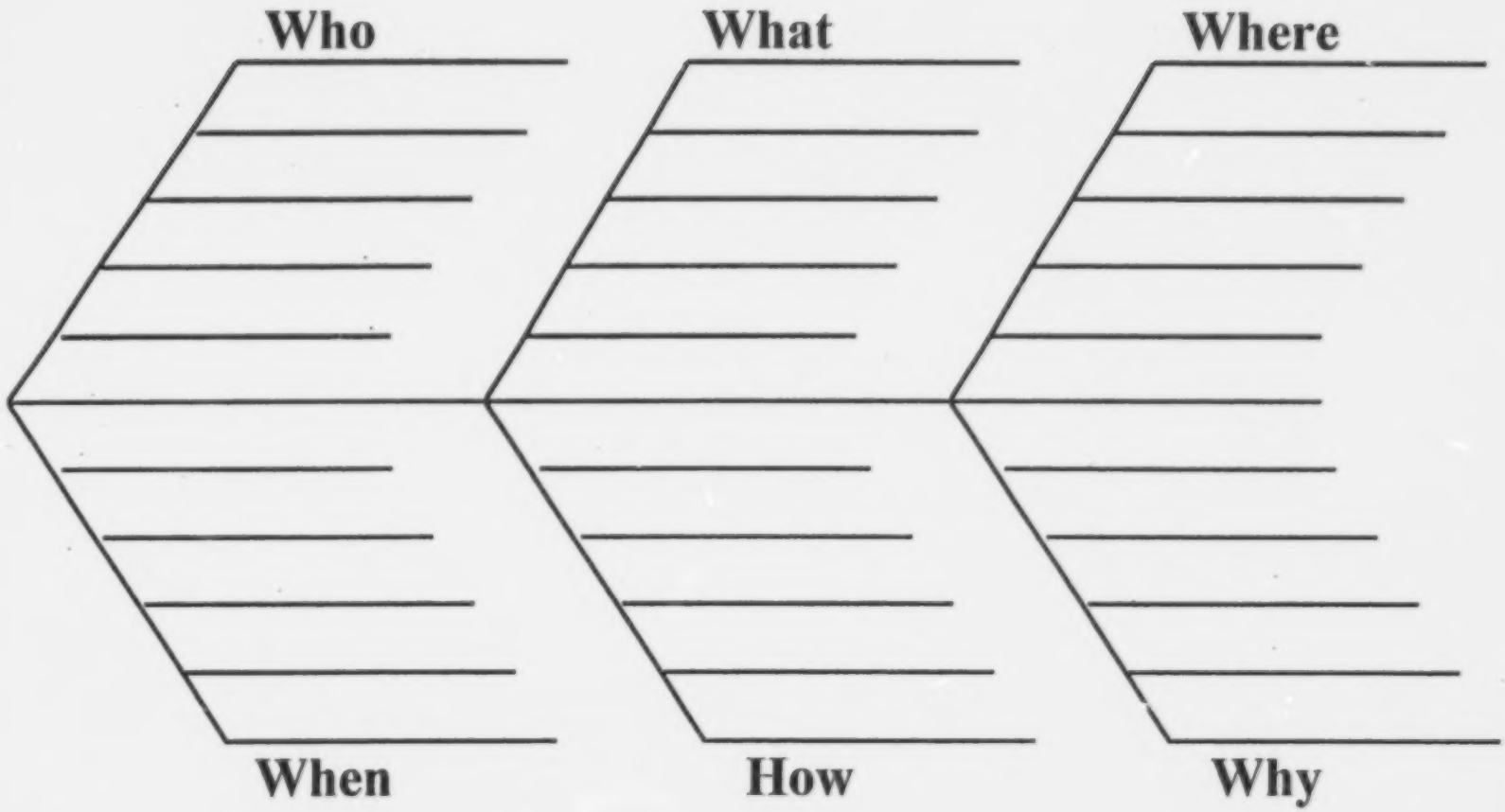
Herringbone



CREATING AN OUTLINE

Learning Goals:
- To create an outline
- To write a complete paragraph/essay

Level: ■

Group Size: 5 or more students

Time: 40 - 50 minutes

Preparation and Materials: 5 Index cards which contain sentences.

Learning Activity:

Give each class member an index card which contains one of the following topic sentences:
-The lifestyles of our society have led to a variety of health problems.
-As job pressures rise so do blood pressure levels.
-Sitting down to a well-balanced meal has become the exception rather than the rule.
-Attempts to maintain regular fitness levels are sporadic at best.
-Americans' health prospects do not look bright.
-Have the class discuss the order these five sentences should occupy in a five paragraph essay. Have the students create an outline on the board. Then, have each student write a paragraph about one of the above sentences following all of the rules of unity, etc. Put the paragraphs in order and have each author read his/her paragraph in turn.

*** Discussion Questions**
1. Why were the paragraphs put in that order? Did the essay sound cohesive?
2. Did each author follow the rules of paragraph unity?

*** Variations** If the class is large, divide the students into five groups of two or more students.

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ORGANIZING THE PIECES

Learning Goals:

- To identify the introduction, body, and conclusion of writing samples

Level: ■

Group Size: Up to 15 students

Time: 25 - 30 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Cut several essays into paragraphs.

Learning Activity:

Have the class work in pairs to put the previously separated paragraphs back in order.

• Discussion Questions

1. Why did you choose to put the paragraphs in that order?
2. What are the characteristics of the introduction, body, and conclusion of each essay?

• Variations

Use this exercise in a computer writing class to teach editing skills (cut and paste) as well as organizational structure. Enter the sample paragraphs into the computers prior to class. Students may work individually or in pairs.

Remarks:

This activity helps students identify what they know about the appropriate structure of compositions.

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BRANCHING

Learning Goals: • To organize writing ideas by branching

Level: ■◆

Group size: Any

Time: 5-15 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Handout *Branching*

Learning Activity:

This organization tool works much like a horizontal outline. Begin with the central idea on the left and build to the right. Not every line will necessarily be filled in.

***Variations** This can also double as a way to brainstorm ideas.

Remarks: In spite of the logic outlining brings to any topic, some students are unable to use it as a tool because they have bad memories of outlining that stretch all the way back to grade school. By turning this into a visual tool and turning the paper into a horizontal position, students often feel less intimidated with branching than they do with a traditional outline.

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Branching

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FREEWRITING

Learning Goals:

- To break writer's block
- To get ideas down quickly and freely
- To build confidence in the student's ability to put words down on paper

Level: •

Group size: Any

Time: 5-15 minutes

Preparation and Materials: None

Learning Activity:

Freewriting is a process of simply putting pen to paper and writing. The process shouldn't be impeded by stopping to check spelling or rearrange ideas. Have students write for 5 to 15 minutes without any interruption. Students may write on any topic in any way. Their pens should keep moving, even if they're only writing, "I can't think of anything to write about."

No evaluation is necessary with this writing. If participates want to share what they've written, they may, but their work should be shared with the understanding that no one will critique it.

The more students practice freewriting, the more substantive their freewriting will become. Encourage learners to freewrite at least three times a week outside of class.

***Variations**

Freewriting can be done to break writer's block, or it can be used to create a very rough first draft after brainstorming and organizing ideas.

Students may highlight a favorite phrase, sentence, or idea in their freewriting. They may also look for phrases, sentences, or ideas that have potential but need to be refined. Have them work at rewriting one of these.

Remarks:

Many developing writers are frozen by a clean, white page. They can't start because they can't get it on paper in perfect form from the first try. Freewriting allows them to write without any pressure of perfection without losing their train

of thought or creative juices. Once it's down on paper, it's much easier to go back and polish. As learners practice freewriting on a regular basis, they'll find that words flow easier and their voices come through more clearly.

References:

Elbow, Peter. *Writing Without Teachers.* Oxford University Press, 1973

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ELEMENTS OF A FORMAL PARAGRAPH

Learning Goals:

- To identify elements of a formal paragraph
- To understand that effective writing requires certain elements within a structure

Level: ●■

Group Size: Any

Time: 20 minutes

Preparation and Materials:

2-3 Highlighters per person
Structured expository paragraph on an overhead or flipchart.
Handout *Paragraph Structure*

Learning Activity:

Read the paragraph to students. After reading it, ask students the following questions. As you discuss each question, have students use highlighters to identify the topic sentence, primary and secondary support, and concluding sentence on the paragraph handout.

***Discussion Questions**

1. What is the paragraph about?
2. Which sentence gives this information?
3. What sentences give important information that further explains the main idea?
4. What sentences give support to these sentences?
5. What sentence pulls everything together in a conclusion?

***Variations**

In addition to or instead of the highlighting, hand out paragraph forms, and have students complete the form using sentences from your paragraph or from their own paragraph.

After identifying the above elements in the formal paragraph, more advanced students can try to identify them in their own work. Follow with the additional questions.

***Discussion Questions**

1. Which of the elements are clearly done in your paragraph?

2. Which are missing or need to be improved?

Have students rewrite or add one sentence to their work to make it stronger.

Remarks:

This activity focuses on the elements in a formal paragraph. Some instructors will consider this to be formula writing. However, novice writers typically appreciate having a formula as a starting point. The writing process can be compared to cooking. First, cooks follow recipes to the quarter of a teaspoon or they create some glorious disasters. After cooking for several decades, they rarely use a recipe and they rarely have disasters. Writing is much the same. Novice writers easily forget some of the most obvious ingredients to successful writing, but as they become more proficient, the elements also become second nature. No longer do they need to consciously remember to start with a hook or add plenty of secondary support or smooth the way with clear transitions. They taste and smell as they write, adding the salt, the spice, the flour as needed.

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Paragraph Structure

Hook:	**Topic sentence:**
Transition:	**Primary support:**
Transitions:	**Secondary support:** **1.** **2.** **3.**
Final Transition:	**Concluding sentence that restates the topic sentence:**

BUILDING PARAGRAPHS FROM TOPIC SENTENCES

Learning Goals:

- To write complete paragraphs
- To practice writing hook, body, and concluding sentences

Level: ■

Group Size: Any

Time: 30 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Write several topic sentences on index cards

Learning Activity:

Have students choose an index card. Each card will display a different topic sentence. Have students write a complete paragraph (hook, body sentences, and concluding sentence) about their topic sentence. Have them share their paragraphs with the group.

*** Discussion Questions**

1. Do the concluding sentences lead you into the next paragraph? What would the topic sentence for the following paragraph be?
2. How do the body sentences flesh out the topic sentence? (i.e. examples, details, chronological information, etc.)
3. Can you combine the topic and hook sentence?

*** Variations**

Have students all write paragraphs about the same topic sentence to observe variations and differences in style.

Give students paragraphs that require them to create topic or hook sentences.

Remarks: Use this exercise in classes where time is at a premium. If you don't have time for students to write complete paragraphs, the second variation is helpful.

References:

Elbow, Peter. *Writing with Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process,* Oxford University Press, New York, 1981.

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US Department of Education

HOOKING THE READER

Learning Goals:

- To understand the importance of attracting the reader from the very first sentence
- To analyze effective and ineffective hooks

Level: ●■◆

Group size: Any

Time: 20 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Handout *The Professionals' hooks*

Learning Activity:

Readers are not obligated to read anything. Consequently, good writers hook their readers in from the very first sentence. Read the examples from the professional writers and discuss the following:

***Discussion Questions**

1. What makes this an effective (or ineffective) hook?
2. Do you want to read further? Why or why not?

***Variations**

After students have had a chance to write their own hooks, use the same format to evaluate their work. Students may work individually, in small groups, or as a class to rewrite hooks for more punch and clarity.

References:

Webb, Suzanne S. *The Resourceful Writer.* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1987

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THE PROFESSIONALS' HOOKS

He was one of the greatest scientists the world has ever known, yet if I had to convey the essence of Albert Einstein in a single word, I would choose *simplicity*.

--Ianesh Hoffmann, "My Friend, Albert Einstein"

I have a terrible confession to make.

--Eugene V. Weinstock, "Confessions of a Nature Hater"

I recall seeing a poster many years ago for an appearance by the guru Mahara-ji, who advertised himself as the "fifteen-year-old perfect master." On the poster a passerby had written, "When I was fifteen, I thought I was perfect too."

--Cullen Murphy, "The Right Wrong Stuff"

Turtles are a kind of bird with the governor turned low.

--Edward Hoagland, "The Courage of Turtles"

At the sodden end of January, when tempers and faces are fusty with indoors, spring puts a tentative foot down in Atlanta.

--Anne Rivers Siddons, "Spring in Atlanta: An Unabashed Love Story"

I had been afraid of Russia ever since I could remember.

--Colin Thubron, "Across White Russia"

Inanimate objects are classified scientifically into three major categories--those that break down, those that get lost, and those that don't work.

--Russell Baker, "The Plot against People"

This is an evening of slightly anemic breezes, feeble but persistent gusts that whisper high in the trees but lack the energy to come down and get in your hair.

--David Dawson, "The Decline of the Front Porch"

Except for fools and madmen, everyone knows that nuclear war would be an unprecedeented human catastrophe.

--Carl Sagan, "The Nuclear Winter"

Warts are wonderful structures.

--Lewis Thomas, "On Warts"

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ANALYZING FIRST AND SECOND DRAFTS

Learning Goals:

- To analyze the work of other writers for strengths and weaknesses
- To recognize the importance of revision in the writing process

Level: ■

Group Size: Any

Time: 30 - 40 minutes

Preparation and Materials: First draft of a writing sample
Second or final draft of the same writing sample

Learning Activity:

Hand out copies of the first draft. Have learners work individually or in small groups to analyze the draft for the following:

***Discussion Questions**

1. What are the overall strengths of the draft?
2. What needs to be improved?
3. What are specific mechanical and grammatical errors?
4. What is the best sentence, phrase, or point in this paragraph?

Hand out copies of the second draft. Have learners analyze the draft for the following:

1. What has been improved in this draft?
2. What still needs to be improved?
3. Which sentence, phrase, or point is now the best?
4. What created this improvement?

***Variations** None

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Remarks:

This is an important first step for learners in the process of evaluating their own work. Evaluating the instructor's work feels safe to most beginning learners. When writing the first and second drafts, try to leave enough changes for the final draft so that learners are able to understand that writing is a process. Accomplished writers rarely stop with their first draft. Instead, they polish, they hone, they rearrange, add, and delete to create the exact message they want.

This process guides learners through the process of making appropriate remarks. They're less likely to be insulting or insensitive to the instructor than they might be if they begin the evaluation process with the work of their peers.

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EVALUATING YOUR OWN WRITING

Learning Goals:

- To analyze students' writing for strengths and weaknesses
- To identify specific strategies for improving weaknesses

Level: ●

Group Size: Any

Time: 15 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Students should bring a personal writing sample to class. If they don't have a piece they have polished, they may analyze work they've done in class, even freewriting samples.

Learning Activity:

Have each student analyze his or her own writing sample in response to the following questions:

***Discussion Questions**

1. What did you do well in this piece?
2. Which sentence or phrase is the best? Why?
3. What still needs to be improved or strengthened?
4. What would make the sample clearer?

Invite students to share their responses as they feel comfortable.

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READ-AROUND PREVIEW

Learning Goals:

- To analyze the strengths and weaknesses of different formats of various writing tasks

Level: ●■◆

Group Size: Any

Time: 1 hour

Preparation and Materials: 5 or 6 sample memos of varying quality (or use letters, reports, evaluations, or other typical workplace writing tasks)
Handout *Read-around Questions*

Learning Activity:

Hand out copies of the memos and Read-around Questions to analyze the memos. Discuss what pitfalls to avoid and what strengths to emulate, using the following questions:

***Discussion Questions**

1. Which ones are easier to read? Why?
2. What errors (grammar, punctuation, etc.) do you see? What impact do these have on the credibility of each memo?
3. What are the strengths of the various memos?
4. What are the weaknesses? Identify specific suggestions for improvements.

***Variations** Vary the handout and discussion questions to fit the writing task.

Remarks: This activity is most effective if it's done just prior to assigning the same writing tasks to the learners. By giving them the opportunity to analyze the work of others prior to writing their own, they are often able to anticipate problem areas and avoid them. If possible, use examples from previous classes (with permission of the learners, of course) or from the company. If you are unable to obtain these

examples, create your own of varying quality. One outcome of the discussion will frequently be that not everyone likes the same format or will choose the same memo as the best. This creates another opportunity to discuss varying one's writing style to fit the audience. Almost always, participants recognize the impact of poorly constructed sentences, misspelled words, or other errors. Consequently, learners generally are more careful to proofread for errors to avoid these mistakes in their own work.

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READ-AROUND

Learning Goals:

- To analyze the work of other writers for strengths and weaknesses
- To recognize the importance of revision in the writing process

Level: ●■◆

Group Size: 4 or more students

Time: 5 - 10 minutes per person plus 20-30 minutes discussion time

Preparation and Materials: Each participant brings a working copy of his or her writing. Handout *Read-around Questions*; each person should have enough sheets to evaluate every writing sample separately.

Learning Activity:

Collect everyone's paper and white out the names. Number each one and make enough copies of each paper so every person has a copy of everyone else's work. Hand out read-around sheets and analyze each essay for strengths and weaknesses. Encourage everyone to be as specific as possible about ways to improve. Allow about 5 to 10 minutes per person per paper. When everyone has finished, discuss individual papers using the read-around sheet as a guideline. If time fails to permit such a detailed discussion, analyze the various papers using the following questions:

***Discussion Questions**

1. Which paper/s is/are the best? Why? Identify the particular sentences, words, or phrases that make each one clearer, more forceful, easier or more interesting to read.

2. In what ways could individual writers still improve their papers? What are some specific suggestions for improvement? (As a group, rewrite sentences as time permits.)

3. What specific mechanical and grammatical errors do you find? How can these be corrected?

4. What strengths of the other writers will you work at

incorporating into your own writing? How will you do this?

Remarks:

This activity has the potential for great success and great failure. When the groundwork has been properly laid for a read-around, learners will find it extremely helpful; when it hasn't been, learners will leave with more anxiety about writing and lower self-esteem. The first key is that students bring a piece of writing that fairly represents their skills and efforts! Logically then, polished drafts are more appropriate than rough drafts; ideally, the drafts should have had the benefit of the instructor's thoughtful analysis, and students should have an opportunity to revise before their work is read by others.

The second key is that students must understand that no two people will be at the same place in their writing skills, and--more importantly--most people feel panicky at the thought of others reading their writing. Therefore, it's essential that students offer positive suggestions to each other. No matter how poor the writing, the readers should find something that they can praise. Likewise, the weaknesses should always be addressed in how something can be improved or made clearer.

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Read-around Questions

Paper #_____ Reader's name_____

1. What are the strengths of this paper?

2. What, if anything, distinguishes this paper from the other papers in the group?

3. What still needs to be improved?

4. Give a specific suggestion for how to make an improvement.

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CRITIQUING THE PROFESSIONALS

Learning Goals:

- To build the connection between writing and reading
- To improve skills critiquing others' writing

Level: ●■

Group Size: 4 or more students

Time: 1 hour

Preparation and Materials: One or two paragraphs from a wide variety of authors, both on overheads and on handouts
Handouts *Critiquing the Professionals*

Learning Activity:

Divide the students into small groups. Have each group use the form to critique one or more examples as time permits. When the groups are finished, discuss the results as a class.

***Variations** For more advanced groups, this form would also work for the learners' own writing as well as other read-around forms.

Remarks: This activity encourages learners to understand how to move from the structure of a formula paragraph to a less structured format. This process also lends itself well to discussions about style, tone, development, and so on.

References: The examples included are the first several paragraphs of essays taken from The Resourceful Writer by Suzanne Webb. Choose your own favorite essays!

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CRITIQUING THE PROFESSIONALS

1. What is the main idea? Is it stated or unstated?

2. If it's stated, where does it occur?

3. If it's unstated, how does the writer convey (get across) the main idea?

4. What do you like or not like about the example?

5. What makes this writer different from the others?

6. How does the writer use each of the following to express his/her ideas?

   a. Word choice

   b. Sentence structure

   c. Examples

   d. Order of information

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The Resourceful Writer

William Strunk, Jr., *The Elements of Style*

Up to this point, the book has been concerned with what is correct, or acceptable in the use if English. In this final chapter, we approach style in its broader meaning: style in the sense of what is distinguished and distinguishing. Here we leave solid ground. Who can confidently say what ignites a certain combination of words, causing them to explode in the mind? Who knows why certain notes in music are capable of stirring the listener deeply, though the same notes slightly rearranged are impotent. These are high mysteries, and this chapter is a mystery story, thinly disguised. There is no satisfactory explanation of style, no infallible guide to good writing, no assurance that a person who thinks clearly will be able to write clearly, no key that unlocks the door, no inflexible rule by which the young writer may shape his course. He will often find himself steering by stars that are disturbingly in motion.

Lewis Thomas, "On Warts"

Warts are wonderful structures. They can appear overnight on any part of the skin, like mushrooms on a damp lawn, full grown and splendid in the complexity of their architecture. Viewed in stained sections under a microscope, they are the most specialized of cellular arrangements, constructed as though for a purpose. They sit there like turreted mounds of dense, impenetrable horn, impregnable, designed for defense against the world outside.

Ann Rivers Siddons, "Spring in Atlanta: An Unabashed Love Story"

At the sodden end of January, when tempers and faces are fusty with indoors, spring puts a tentative foot down in Atlanta. There's the first flush of yellow forsythia, polite as a poor relation, uncertain as a twelve-year-old at dancing class. The red flowering quinces follow, bolder and tougher, and a spiky daffodil or tow, and perhaps a few suicidal camellias, made giddy by a spell of warm February treachery.

After them, the deluge. Spring--the genuine article, the full-time, live-in Atlanta spring, doesn't unfurl in slow, sweet ribbons. It comes in with ruffles and flourishes, a whoop of rowdy azaleas, battalions of tulips, a cannonade of dogwood. Small, fierce deployments--the little bulbs, the hyacinths and iris, the thrift and candytuft and pansies--overrun the precise bones of winter. The purple and white wisteria smother the last remnants of resistance with implacable benevolence. The city is secured within a week.

Russell Baker, "The Plot against People"

Inanimate objects are classified scientifically into three major categories-=those that break down, those that get lost, and those that don't work.

The goal of all inanimate objects is to resist man and ultimately to defeat him, and the three major classifications are based on the method each object uses to achieve its purpose. As a general rule, any object capable of breaking down at the moment when it is most needed will do so. The automobile is typical of the category.

With the cunning peculiar to its breed, the automobile never breaks down while entering

a filling station which has a large staff of idle mechanics. It waits until it reaches a downtown intersection in the middle of the rush hour, or until it is fully loaded with family and luggage on the Ohio turnpike. Thus it creates maximum inconvenience, frustration, and irritability, thereby reducing its owner's lifespan.

Carl Sagan, "The Nuclear Winter"

Except for fools and madmen, everyone knows that nuclear war would be an unprecedented human catastrophe. A more or less typical strategic warhead has a yield of 2 megatons, the explosive equivalent of 2 million tons of TNT. But 2 million tons of TNT is about the same as all the bombs exploded in World War II single bomb with the explosive power of the entire Second World War but compressed into a few seconds of time and an area 30 or 40 miles across....

In a 2-megaton explosion over a fairly large city, buildings would be vaporized, people reduced to atoms and shadow, outlying structures blown down like matchsticks and raging fires ignited. And if the bomb were exploded on the ground, an enormous crater, like those that can be seen through a telescope on the surface of the moon, would be all the remained where midtown once had been. There are more than 50,000 nuclear weapons, more than 13,000 megatons of yield, deployed in the arsenals of the United States and the Soviet Union--enough to obliterate a million Hiroshimas.

Judy Syfers, "I Want a Wife"

I belong to that classification of people known as wives. I am a Wife. And, not altogether incidentally, I am a mother.

Not too long ago a male friend of mine appeared on the scene fresh from a recent divorce. He had one child, who is, of course, with his ex-wife. He is obviously looking for another wife. As I thought about him while I was ironing one evening, it suddenly occurred to me that I, too, would like to have a wife. Why do I want a wife?

I would like to go back to school so that I can become economically independent, support myself, and , if need be, support those dependent upon me. I want a wife who will work and send me to school. And while I am going to school I want a wife to take care of my children. I want a wife to keep track of the children's doctor and dentist appointments. And to keep track of mine, too. I want a wife to make sure my children eat properly and are kept clean. I want a wife who will wash the children's clothes and keep them mended. I want a wife who takes care of the children when they are sick, a wife who arranges to be around when the children need special care, because, of course, I cannot miss classes at school. My wife must arrange to lose time at work and not lose the job. It may mean a small cut in my wife's income from time to time, but I guess I can tolerate that. Needless to say, my wife will arrange and pay for the care of the children while my wife is working.

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ANALYZING TONE

Learning Goals:

- To identify specific elements that create tone
- To manipulate those elements to adjust tone

Level: ■◆

Group size: Any

Time: 30 - 45 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Samples that represent a variety of tone (the works of professionals, students or a combination)
Handout *Tone Worksheet*

Learning Activity:

Tone expresses the writer's attitudes about the subject and toward the audience. Consequently, writers change tone with every piece they write. Have students use the handout to analyze the various writing samples. Follow with the discussion questions.

***Discussion Questions**

1. Which pieces are formal? Informal? Angry? Sincere? Knowledgable? Friendly? etc.
2. What elements create this in each piece?
3. What could be changed to make a piece more formal? Informal? Sincere? etc.
4. What effect does the tone have on the reader?

***Variations** After participants have discussed the writings of others, have them analyze and rewrite one of their own writing samples.

Remarks: Breaking down the elements that create tone is a sophisticated skill. Students may have trouble taking this one step further and changing the tone in their own work. Being able to adjust tone allows the writer to whisper rather than shout at the reader.

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TONE WORKSHEET

Example	Use of Pronouns (I, you, we, he, they, etc.)	Use of Active or Passive Voice	Choice of words	Acknowledge-ment of the reader	Level of Formality	Overall Tone

POSITIVE WRITING

Learning Goals: • To recognize positive writing styles

Level: ■

Group Size: 2 - 20 people participants

Time: 25 - 40 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Paper and pencils for students

Learning Activity:

Give students information that they can use to compose a memo for all personnel. The information will have a negative slant (i.e. All Cafeterias Closed, Maintenance, March 31- April 13, Painting/Repairs). Make copies of several memos and evaluate whether the information was relayed in a positive or negative manner. Then, have students re-write the memos using a more positive tone.

• **Discussion Questions**

1. Why does positive or negative tone matter in written communication?
2. What effect does receiving a positive or negative written communication have on employees? Discuss examples.
3. How does positive or negative tone in written communication affect the morale in the workplace?

• **Variations** Place company-wide memorandums on overhead. Have students identify whether the tone is negative or positive. Have them brainstorm ideas to make the memos more positive.

Remarks: This activity builds awareness of the importance of tone in written communication.

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AVOIDING OPINION PHRASES

Learning Goals:

- To recognize that opinion phrases weaken the writer's impact.
- To identify and correct opinion phrases in the student's work

Level: ●■◆

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Examples from professional writers
Handout *Avoid Opinion Phrases*

Learning Activity:

Show the example with the opinion phrase inserted; then show the example as it was originally written.

***Discussion Questions**

1. Which statement is stronger? More convincing?
2. What makes the difference?
3. How do opinion phrases strengthen or weaken the message?
4. Are they ever appropriate--even important--to use?

Have students examine their own work to find opinion phrases. Have them delete them or change them to more forceful direct statements.

***Variations** Instead of using the work of professional writers, secure permission to use students' work. As a class, rewrite passages to delete opinion phrases and make sentences stronger.

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AVOID OPINION PHRASES

I think professional athletes are sometimes severely disadvantaged by trainers whose job it is to keep them in action.

Professional athletes are sometimes severely disadvantaged by trainers whose job it is to keep them in action.

--Norman Cousins, "Pain is Not the Ultimate Enemy"

In my opinion, there are seven basic signals that get communicated from the [baseball] manager . . . to the players.

In general, there are in general seven basic signals that get communicated from the [baseball] manager . . . to the players.

--Rockwell Stenrud, "Who's on Third"

Nicotine is a familiar and widely recognized drug, a stimulant to the central nervous system. I believe it is addictive.

Nicotine is a familiar and widely recognized drug, a stimulant to the central nervous system. It is addictive.

--Adam Smith, "A Very Short History of Some American Drugs Familiar to Everybody"

A New York taxi driver . . . is licensed to operate, and thereby earn his living, by the city. One of the rules in the taxi code stipulates that the cabdriver must take his customer to any point within the city limits that the rider requests. Never mind that the driver makes more money operating in Manhattan; is lost when he enters the precincts of Brooklyn; is frightened by the prospect of a trip to Harlem at night. I think the rules are clear. He must go where the customer asks.

A New York taxi driver . . . is licensed to operate, and thereby earn his living, by the city. One of the rules in the taxi code stipulates that the cabdriver must take his customer to any point within the city limits that the rider requests. Never mind that the driver makes more money operating in Manhattan; is lost when he enters the precincts of Brooklyn; is frightened by the prospect of a trip to Harlem at night. The rules are clear. He must go where the customer asks.

--Willard Gaylin, *The Rage Within*

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ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

Learning Goals:

- To identify active and passive voice
- To learn to change passive voice to active
- To understand when to use passive or active voice

Level: ■◆

Group Size: Any

Time: 15 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Samples of passive voice sentences taken from students' work
Handout *Active and Passive Voice*

Learning Activity:

Write the following two sentences on the board:

My brother was bitten by a rattlesnake.
A rattlesnake bit my brother.

***Discussion Questions**

1. What are the differences in the two sentences?
2. Who is the "doer" of the action in each sentence? Where is the doer in each sentence?
3. What is the verb in each sentence?
4. Which sentence has more punch?
5. When would it be appropriate to use the first sentence? The second?

Give the students the *Active and Passive Voice* handout. Put examples from students' papers on the overhead to analyze as a group. Turn each passive voice sentence into active voice.

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ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

	Doer of the Action	Receiver of the Action	Verb	Length	When to use
Active Voice: Example: Dad spilled the milk.	• The subject • Usually named at the beginning of the clause	• The direct object • Follows the verb	• May be any tense • Will always be one word shorter than passive voice	• If the doer is named, will always be shorter than passive voice	• As much as possible!
Passive Voice: Example: The milk was spilled by Dad.	• The object of a preposition (often by) • Usually named at the end of the clause • May not be named	• Receiver is the subject • Usually named at the beginning of the clause	• Will always include the present or past participle of to be • Will always be one word longer than active voice	• If the doer is not named, may be shorter than active voice	• When the doer is unimportant or unknown • *Occasionally,* for a change of pace

GRAMMAR

Many people, not just beginning writers, equate grammar skills with good writing. While the two are very interconnected, one does not assure the other. As much as possible, grammar should be taught in the context of the students' own examples. This presents a challenge for the instructor. When grammar is taught with a textbook or prewritten exercises, students may learn to recognize the concepts in the textbook but don't transfer what they've learned to their own writing. On the other hand, when teachers use only student work, instruction can seem disorganized and fragmented, with every aspect of grammar touched on but none completely explained. The best approach is to combine the two. Whenever a concept is taught, teachers should feel free to use textbooks or prewritten exercises, but students should always practice writing their own examples. They should also look for correct or incorrect examples in their previous work.

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PUTTING GRAMMAR IN PERSPECTIVE

Learning Goals:

- To make learners aware that the message is still more important than the grammar

Level: ●

Group Size: Any

Time: 5 minutes

Preparation and Materials: None

Learning Activity:

Write the following statement on the board: Forty-nine plus thirty-six equal/equals eighty-four.

***Discussion Questions**

1. What is the correct answer?

After students have had some time to discuss the problem, point out that the correct answer is eighty-five.

Remarks:

Most people automatically focus on which verb is correct. The point of the activity is that the content or message is more important than the grammar. Perfect grammar won't salvage a mistake in the content.

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THE CASE FOR USING STANDARD GRAMMAR

Learning Goals:
- To recognize the importance of using standard grammar

Level:
- ●

Group Size: Any

Time: 10-15 minutes per person

Preparation and Materials: None

Learning Activity:

Have students write on one of the following prompts:
Describe an experience in which you were judged by your language (dialect, grammar, ESL, etc.).
Describe an experience in which you judged someone by his or her language.

***Discussion Questions**

1. What happens when a person doesn't use standard English?
2. Is this true in every situation?
3. How might work/friends/job interview language differ?

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LIVING SENTENCES

Learning Goals:
- To learn grammar basics from "living" sentences

Level: ●■♦

Group Size: Any

Time: 15 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Make a handout with selected student sentences or prepare flip chart with sentences

Learning Activity:

Handout or post the students' sentences. Have them discuss what they think is right or wrong with a particular sentence. Then, discuss the grammar or punctuation rule that applies.

*** Discussion Questions**

1. What type of sentence structure is this?
2. Do you need internal punctuation?
3. Would you change anything? Why?
4. What do you like about this sentence? Why?

*** Variations** The sentences can be typed up as punctuation and grammar exercises.

Remarks: Although this is a very basic exercise, students need to work with "real" sentences. The application is learned more quickly this way than by using "made up" sentences to illustrate grammatical or punctuation rules.

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INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT CLAUSES

Learning Goals:

- To improve understanding of dependent and independent clauses
- To practice manipulating clauses into more effective sentences

Level: ●

Group Size: Any

Time: 15-20 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Handout *Conjunctions: Definition*

Learning Activity:

Have each student write 10 or more independent and dependent clauses. Cut the clauses into strips, mix in a hat, and redistribute to the other students. Have students decide which are independent clauses and which are dependent clauses, double checking as a class to make sure they are correct. Have them re-write the independent clauses into dependent ones and visa versa. Finally, have them combine two or more clauses into a single sentence.

***Discussion Questions:** None

***Variations** For classes still struggling with the difference between independent and dependent clauses, create examples, cut into strips, and distribute them to the students.

Remarks: Encourage this to be as fun and playful as possible. Discuss the nuances of various ways of combining the clauses. Guide students to see the power writers have in communicating to readers in the way they manipulate sentences.

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CONJUNCTIONS

Learning Goals:

- To define and use coordinating and subordinating conjunctions
- To define and use conjunctive adverbs or transition words

Level: ●

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 - 20 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Handout *Conjunctions: Definition*

Learning Activity:

Have students write sentences with the different kinds of conjunctions.

Remarks: To understand the sentence structure system, learners need to recognize and use the different kinds of conjunctions.

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CONJUNCTIONS: DEFINITION

Definition:
A conjunction is a word that connects or joins words, phrases, and clauses. There are four kinds of conjunctions.

Coordinate Conjunctions:
for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so (FANBOYS)

They are used to connect words, phrases, and clauses of equal rank.

Words:	*John* and *Mary* live next door.
Phrases:	Sam had two choices: *eating his vegetables* or *staying scrawny*.
Clauses:	*His efforts were useless,* but *his intentions were good.*

Subordinate Conjunctions:
after, because, since, until, so that, when, while, although, if, etc.

They are used to begin subordinate or dependent clauses. Some subordiante conjunctions are also used as prepositions: after, before, since , until, etc.

Preposition:
After lunch, I'm taking a nap.
He hasn't called *since* Monday.
John left *before* Mary.

Subordinate Conjunctions:
After we eat lunch, I'm taking a nap.
He hasn't called *since he called Monday.*
John left *before Mary did.*

Conjunctive Adverbs:
moreover, therefore, then, however, nevertheless, etc.

They are used as transitions between clauses.
Bob, however, spells his name backwards occasionally.

Conjunctive Adverb:

Bob spells his name backwards occasionally; however, no one seems to notice.

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SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

The following are common subordinating conjunctions.

after	before	rather than	though	where
although	even though	since	unless	whether
as	if	so that	until	while
as if	how	than	when	why
because	that	in order that		

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SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Learning Goals:
- To recognize and use A, B, C, D, and E sentence structures

Level: ●

Group Size: Any

Time: 2 hours

Preparation and Materials: Handouts *Sentence Structure A; Sentence Structure B; Sentence Structure C; Sentence Structure D; Sentence Structure E*
Sentence Structure A, B, C, D, and E

Learning Activity:

The instructor should introduce sentence structures in order, one at a time. After structure A is explained, the class should practice on sample sentences as a group and then individuals should practice writing their own sentences. Learners will find it easier to use short and simple independent clauses rather than complicated ones. To understand better how to manipulate clauses and phrases, they should use the independent clauses from structure A as they work their way through the remaining sentence structures. Encourage students to share the sentences they've written with the rest of the class.

***Variations** Ask students to go through their paragraphs and identify all the sentence structures they've used. Identify the multiple ways phrases and clauses can be combined for variety and subtleness.

Remarks: This sentence structure system is fairly straightforward. To be able to understand it, participants must be able to recognize independent and dependent clauses and conjunctions. Depending on participants' skill levels, this may need to be an additional lesson, or it may be enough to review clauses and conjunctions in 15 to 20 minutes and then move on to the sentence structures.

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SENTENCE STRUCTURE A

Features:

- ✓ An independent clause (expresses a single and complete idea)
- ✓ A complete subject and a complete predicate
- ✓ No internal punctuation unless there is a list
- ✓ A simple sentence

Examples:

It is hard to be good. *--Pittacus*

It = complete subject Is hard to be good = complete predicate

The chief function of your body is to carry your brain around.

--Thomas Alva Edison

The chief function of your body = complete subject
is to carry your brain around = complete predicate

Genius is an African who dreams up snow. *--Vladimir Nabokov*

Genius = complete subject
is an African who dreams up snow = complete predicate

Your Examples:

1.

2.

3.

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Not an A structure:

Sometimes it helps to define what something isn't in order to identify it more clearly. One temptation many writers have is to put a comma in wherever they think a writer may need to breathe. The wonderful thing about silent reading is that readers can read and breathe at the same time. It isn't necessary to remind them to do so. In fact, if the writer uses too many commas, readers will, at best, be confused; at worst--if they truly do breathe at every comma--they'll hyperventilate. The A structure sentence often falls victim to extra commas because writers worry about long strings of words and no breaks. The most frequent temptation is to put commas between compound elements, in the process treating them like a list. The following sentence illustrates this.

America is a country that doesn't know where it is going but is determined to set a speed record getting there. *--Lawrence J. Peter*

You may be tempted to insert a comma between *going* and *but*. However, the sentence does not need a comma because it doesn't have a list; it has only two elements:

1) doesn't know where it is going
2) is determined to set a speed record getting there

Nor does the sentence have more than one independent clause. If the sentence would read as follows, then a comma becomes necessary because it has two independent clauses.

America is a country that doesn't know where it is going, but it is determined to set a speed record getting there.

Likewise, if a third element is added to the list, a comma may be used. With apologies to Lawrence Peter, the following sentence illustrates this.

America is a country that doesn't know where it is going, is determined to set a speed record getting there, and will be surprised about wherever it arrives.

Even in this sentence, though, the second comma is optional. Some writers consider *and* to do the duty of a comma, and it certainly can. However, for no more work than it takes to insert a comma, adding one before the final item in a list also adds clarity to the sentence. It helps to signal that the end is near--the end of the sentence, not the end of the world. Writers haven't learned to signal that with punctuation.

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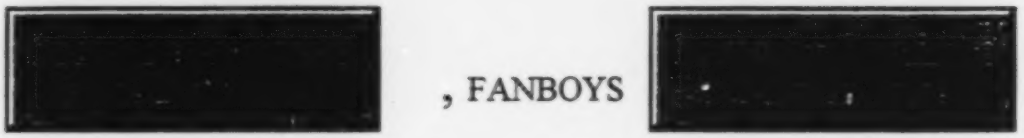
SENTENCE STRUCTURE B



Features:

- ✓ Two or more independent clauses that can stand individually
- ✓ Joined by a comma and a FANBOYS (coordinating conjuntion: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)
- ✓ May be joined by a semicolon (;), colon (:), or dash (--) instead of the comma and the FANBOYS
- ✓ May be joined by a semicolon (;), conjunctive adverb (however, therefore, moreover, etc.) or transitional phrase, and a comma
- ✓ Content of the two clauses is equal and related
- ✓ A compound sentence

Examples:

Everyone is a genius at least once a year; a real genius has his original ideas closer together. *--G.C. Lichtenberg*

Everyone is a genius at least once a year = independent clause
a real genius has his original ideas closer together = independent clause

Knowledge may give weight, but accomplishments give lustre, and many more people see than weigh. *--Philip Dormer Stanhope, Early of Chesterfield*

Knowledge may give weight = independent clause
accomplishments give lustre = independent clause
many more people see than weigh = independent clause

Don't drink in public; you might act like yourself. *--US News and World Report*

Don't drink in public = independent clause
you might act like yourself = independent clause

Your Examples:

1.

2.

3.

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Run-on Sentence

In a B structure sentence, some mistakes are greater sins than others. The most troublesome error for the reader is if two independent clauses are back to back without any punctuation between them as in the following:

Injustice is relatively easy to bear what stings is justice.

This is called a *run-on sentence*. More than any mistake other than a fragment, it forces the reader to work too hard. Fortunately, this problem is easily fixed. Any one of the following will easily remedy the error:

- comma and FANBOYS
- semicolon
- semicolon, conjunctive adverb or transition phrase, and comma
- colon
- dash
- period and capital letter

The following are all examples of how the above sentence could be repaired.

Comma and FANBOYS:	Injustice is relatively easy to bear, **but** what stings is justice.
Semicolon:	Injustice is relatively easy to bear; what stings is justice. *H.L. Mencken*
Semicolon, CA:	Injustice is relatively easy to bear; **however,** what stings is justice.
Colon:	Injustice is relatively easy to bear: what stings is justice.
Dash:	Injustice is ralatively easy to bear--what stings is justice.
Period and Capital:	Injustice is relatively easy to bear. What stings is justice.

Each method of dividing the two clauses creates a slightly different impact. For instance, the semicolon and conjunctive adverb produce a more formal, academic sounding sentence while the dash seems more informal. Separating the clauses into two sentences makes them choppy; conversely, adding the comma and FANBOYS makes the sentence wordy. Although all of these are grammatically correct, some produce a punchier sentence than the others.

Comma Splice

A more common--and somewhat less confusing--mistake writers make is to pull two independent clauses together into a single sentence and join them with only a comma rather than a comma

and a FANBOYS. In grammatical terms this is called a *comma splice*. Because a comma is not strong enough punctuation to hold two clauses together, a comma splice is considered a major mistake or a minor faux pas, depending on the social circles in which the writer travels. The exception to this is if the independent clauses are short and parallel in construction, as in the following:

We came, we saw, we ate.

Semicolons or FANBOYS would pointlessly slow down the reader, and the sentence would lose its crispness. Likewise, separating the clauses into individual sentences would be too choppy.

FANBOYS Only

In the most typical--and least offensive--mistake, the writer joins independent clauses with a FANBOYS but leaves out the comma. Again, exceptions to this rule exist. As with a comma splice, when short, parallel independent clauses are joined, the comma may be dropped. This is not only forgivable but sometimes preferable if the extra punctuation would slow down the reader. The following sentence illustrates this nicely.

I've been rich and I've been poor; rich is better. *Sophie Tucker*

While a comma between the first and second clauses would not be wrong, it just isn't necessary. Consequently, the sentence flows better as it is. This sentence also nicely illustrates how effective a semicolon can be. If Sophie Tucker would have used a comma and a FANBOYS (most logically *but*), the sentence would read like a popped balloon. The semicolon pulls the third clause in tight and clean, forcing the reader to sit up and pay attention to the final clause.

When to use a semicolon:

When semicolons are used correctly, they add polish and sophistication to writing. When used incorrectly, the mistake glares at the reader and shouts, "This writer is only pretending to know how to write. Doesn't he look silly?" Okay, maybe the semicolon doesn't shout. But it definately glares. To avoid being embarrassed by a piece of punctuation, the writer should abide by this rule of thumb: Except for using a semicolon between items in a series, an independent clause should always come *before* and *after* the semicolon. A dependent clause alone won't do. The clause must be able to stand by itself as a sentence. In fact, the best test for using a semicolon is to substitute a period for the semicolon. If no fragment appears, the semicolon may be used. If one of the clauses turns into a fragment, a comma is probably the correct punctuation.

When to use a colon:

A colon has a little more flexibility. Unfortunately, this results in abuse as well. Any grammar book will say that an independent clause *always* comes before a colon. A single word, list, phrase, or independent clause may come after a colon. This means that a colon should never follow the verb as in this sentence:

Incorrect: Students need: pencils, paper, books, and thinking caps.

Correct: Students need pencils, paper, books, and thinking caps.

As with the semicolon, the best test for whether or not a colon is correct is to put a period in place of the colon. If the clause before the colon is independent, a colon is correct. If the reader is left hanging, it's incorrect. Having said all of this, it's worth noting that the standards for using the colon are changing. It is not uncommon to see the colon used instead of a comma after an introductory word or phrase such as the following:

Without a doubt: Punctuation rules are changing.

Notice that the first word after the colon is capitalized. Using a lower-case letter is also correct. However, the writer should be consistent.

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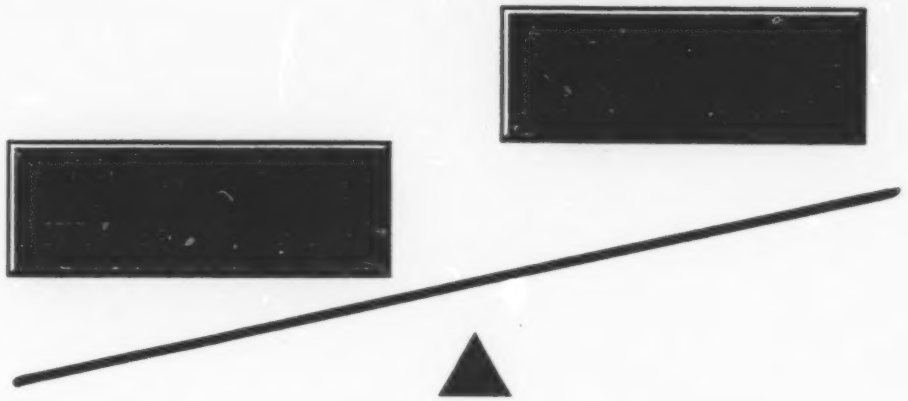
SENTENCE STRUCTURE C



Features:

- ✓ Is an independent clause followed by a dependent clause
- ✓ Is a dependent clause signaled by a subordinating conjunction
- ✓ Has no internal punctuation between clauses (exceptions: clauses beginning with *although, even though, as if,* and *even if* may sometimes require a comma)
- ✓ Is a complex sentence

Examples:

No man can think clearly when his fists are clenched. *George Jean Nathan*

No man can think clearly = independent clause
when his fists are clenched = dependent clause

A fanatic is someone who redoubles his efforts when he's forgotten his aim.

A fanatic is someone = independent clause *Chuck Jones (animator of Wiley Coyote)*
who redoubles his efforts = dependent clause
when he's forgotten his aim = dependent clause

Never tell anyone to go to hell unless you can make 'em go. *US News*

Never tell anyone to go to hell = independent clause
unless you can make 'em go = dependent clause

Your Examples:

1.

2.

3.

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Beware!

C structure sentences can sometimes be tricky. Writers with unpracticed ears are often tempted to put commas between independent and dependent clauses. Keep in mind that commas always have a purpose. They help the reader avoid confusion by signaling that the focus of the sentence is shifting. Although adding a comma unnecessarily between an independent and dependent clause is not as confusing as it is in some of the other sentence structures, the rule of thumb is to use less punctuation rather than more. Commas slow the reader down. Sometimes this is necessary, just as a speed bump sign necessarily slows down a driver. However, the highway department tries not to post speed bump signs when there are no speed bumps. Likewise, if readers don't need to slow down, the writer should make every effort not to slow them down.

Watch, too, for sentences where the subordinating conjunction is understood. The most common example of this is the subordinating conjunction "that." If a dependent clause reads clearly and means the same thing with or without "that," remove it. Always opt for the shorter version.

The following sentences illustrate this point:

A man will pay $2 for a $1 item he wants. A woman will pay $1 for a $2 item she doesn't want. *Wal-Mart's chairman on the nature of Christmas Shopping, US News*

A man will pay $2 for a $1 item = independent clause
[that] he wants = dependent clause
A woman will pay $1 for a $2 item = independent clause
[that] she doesn't want = dependent clause

Many a man has fallen in love with a girl in a light so dim he would not have chosen a suit by it. *Maurice Chevalier*

Many a man has fallen love with a girl in a light so dim = independent clause
[that] he would not have chosen a suit by it = dependent clause

In both examples, the reader understands the meaning without having to read the sentence twice. Thus the sentences are stronger and clearer without "that."

In addition, writers may be confused about when to use *so* and when to use *so that*. The distinction is important because *so* separates independent clauses and requires a comma while *so that* separates an independent clause from a dependent clause and does not take a comma. To remember when to use each one, think of *so* as the same as *therefore*. *So that* means *in order to* or *in order that*. The following sentences illustrate the difference.

We left home early, so we were one of the first in line at the theater.
(We left early, *therefore* we were one of the first.)

We left home early so we could be one of the first in line at the theater.
(We left early *in order to* be first in line.)

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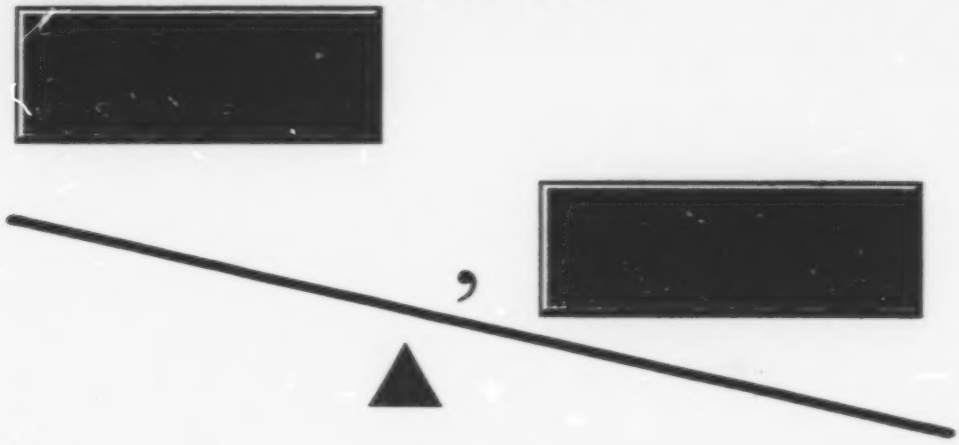
SENTENCE STRUCTURE D



Features:

- ✓ Single word, phrase, or dependent clause followed by an independent clause
- ✓ Dependent clause generally signalled by a subordinating conjunction
- ✓ Two parts separated by a comma

Examples:

If I owned Texas and Hell, I would rent out Texas and live in Hell. *Gen. Phillip H. Sheridan*

If I owned Texas and Hell = dependent clause
I would rent out Texas and live in Hell = independent clause

If fifty million people say a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing. *Anatole France*

If fifty million people say a foolish thing = dependent clause
it is still a foolish thing = independent clause

When choosing between two evils, I always like to try the one I've never tried before. *Mae West*

When choosing between two evils = phrase
I always like to try the one I've never tried before = independent clause

In general, the art of government consists in taking as much money as possible from one class of citizens to give it to the other. *Voltaire*

In general = phrase
the art of government consists in taking as much money as possible from one class of citizens to give it to the other = independent clause

Your Examples:

1.

2.

3.

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Since the goal of a good writer is to make the reader's job as easy as possible, forgetting to put a comma in a D structure sentence is as close to sin as one can get in grammar. Without the comma, the reader may have to read the sentence twice or miss the meaning entirely. If you doubt the importance of the comma, read the following sentence:

While we were eating scorpions crawled into our campsite.

Not only are readers forced to re-read the sentence and mentally insert a comma to understand it, but for at least a brief moment, they're also burdened with uneasy thoughts about the writer's culinary habits. At best, the writer creates more work for readers; at worst the writer distracts them for the next several sentences and may never regain their interest.

Sometimes, the comma is not only important for easier reading, but it also impacts the meaning as in the following two sentences:

Mary, read this.
Mary read this.

In the first sentence, Mary is being spoken *to*. In the second, she is spoken *about*. Notice that the comma actually changes the pronunciation of "read." Although this impact is rare, it nicely illustrates just how important the comma can be.

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SENTENCE STRUCTURE E

Features:

- ✓ Independent clause interrupted by unnecessary or nonrestrictive information
- ✓ Nonrestrictive (unnecessary) material always set off by a pair of commas, dashes, parenthesis, or brackets if it comes between the subject and the predicate

Examples:

All government--indeed, every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and every prudent act--is founded on compromise and barter. *Edmund Burke*

All government is founded on compromise and barter = independent clause
indeed, every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and every prudent act = nonrestrictive, unnecessary phrase

Trim sentences, like trim bodies, usually require far more effort than flabby ones. *Clair Kehrwald Cook*

Trim sentences usually require far more effort than flabby ones = independent clause
like trim bodies = nonrestrictive, unnecessary information

Not an E Structure

All persons as they grow less prosperous grow more suspicious. *Terence*

All persons grow more suspicious = independent clause
as they grow less prosperous = restrictive, necessary dependent clause

Your Examples:

1.

2.

3.

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In an E structure, anything between the commas can be deleted and the sentence will still make sense grammatically and informationally. This is why the last sentence on the worksheet is *not* an E even though it contains a dependent clause between the subject and the predicate. Terence doesn't write that all men grow more suspicious, only those who grow less prosperous grow more suspicious. If the information between the subject and the predicate helps to define the subject, then it is important, or restrictive, and no commas should be used. If the information between the subject and the predicate re-explains the subject or emphasizes the subject, then it is unimportant, or nonrestrictive, and a pair of commas should be used.

Be careful not to separate the subject from the verb with a single comma. This would make no more sense to the careful reader than if the writer used only one half of the parenthesis as in the following sentence:

A diplomat as Caskie Stinnett once said) is a person who can tell you to go to hell in such a way that you actually look forward to the trip.

The single half of the parenthesis is confusing. Good readers stop and go back to look for the other half because they know instinctively that they must have missed the other part of the parenthesis and, therefore, have misread the information. A single comma in between "said" and "is" does the same thing to careful readers. If the writer thinks a comma belongs just before the verb, it might. However, the writer should also go back and look where the other comma should go. If the information between the commas can be deleted and the sentence still makes sense, then the pair of commas belong.

The challenge in punctuating an E structure is in deciding what is important, or restrictive, and what is unimportant, or nonrestrictive information. Unfortunately, it's not as simple as looking for key words such as a coordinating or subordinating conjunction. Instead, deciding whether information is important or unimportant depends on the meaning of the words in the sentence. The following is a good example:

My sister Sherri lives in Indiana.
My sister, Sherri, lives in Indiana.

As subtle as it may seem, the punctuation in these sentences tells the reader how many sisters the writer has. In the first sentence, the writer has several sisters, and the sister named Sherri lives in Indiana. In the second sentence, the writer has only one sister; the commas are a simple way of saying, "By the way, her name is Sherri." Most of the time the significance of the commas or lack of commas will not be critical. However, on occasion, the writer can dramatically change lives as in the following sentence:

John's wife, Mary, is an avid gardener.
John's wife Mary is an avid gardener.

In the first sentence, John is in a committed, monogamous relationship with his wife. In the

In the first sentence, John is in a committed, monogamous relationship with his wife. In the second sentence, John is bigamous. The louse.

While not all readers will be sophisticated enough to pick up the difference, as a courtesy to those who are, try to use commas to say what you mean.

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SENTENCE STRUCTURE: A, B, C, D, and E

A Structure:

The dog barked. The cat fainted.	two independent clauses no internal punctuation needed

B Structure:

The dog barked, and the cat fainted.	two independent clauses connected by a comma and a FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)
The dog barked: the cat fainted.	two independent clauses connected into a single sentence using a semicolon, colon, or a dash
The dog barked; therefore, the cat fainted.	two independent clauses connected by semicolon, a conjunctive adverb or transition phrase, and a comma

C Structure:

The cat fainted because the dog barked.	independent clause followed by a dependent adverbial clause; no internal punctuation needed; adverbial clause signaled by subordinating conjunctions such as after, before, since, if until

D Structure:

When the dog barked, the cat fainted.	dependent adverbial clause, phrase, or single word followed by an independent clause; a comma separates the two

E Structure:

The cat, who needed therapy, fainted.	independent clause with an unnecessary interruption between the subject and the predicate; parenthesis or a pair of commas or dashes used

Not an E Structure:

The dog in the tree barked.	independent clause with a necessary, or restrictive, interruption between the subject and the predicate; no punctuation used

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VISUAL SPELLING

Learning Goals: • To strengthen visualization skills for spelling

Level: ●

Group Size: Any

Time: 15 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Create a handout of steps for the learners (optional)

Learning Activity:

Explain to the class that spelling is a writing skill. You can understand, say, and read many words you can't spell. To improve your spelling, improve your visualization skills. You'll find it much easier to *picture* a word and then write it rather than to *sound out* a word and write it. Practice the following steps as you learn to spell a new word or a troublesome old one. An important key to learning how to spell a word is to make sure you know what the word means and how it's used.

Choose a troublesome word for the class to practice; then, have the students follow these steps.

Write the word on a note card. Hold the card so that you have to look up to see the word.

Using your eye as a pencil, trace each letter in the word. Note and remember which letters go up or down. How many vowels are there? In what order are they? Are there any silent letters? Double letters? Small words within the word? What trouble spots do you have? Put those letters in red in your mind, or put a box around them. Play with the letters in this way until you have a clear visual memory of the word.

Put the card down and look up again. Can you "see" the word? (If you can't, repeat step 2 until you can.) Again, play with the word. What letters go up or down? What are the vowels? And so on.

When you feel confident that you have a good visual memory of the word, spell the word forwards then backwards. "Look" at the letters as you spell. Don't use your ear or memory, just your eyes. When you spell the word backwards as quickly as you can spell it forwards, you know the word.

Put the word back into your visual field and take a mental picture of it.

Write the word. Be conscious of how the word feels as you write it. When does your hand go up or down? Pay attention to how your body reacts: If your brow wrinkles at a point in the word or if your hand pulls back, you've probably written a wrong letter. Go back and fix the word.

Look at the word one last time. Does it match what you've written? If not, go back and fix your visual memory of the word. Exaggerate the problem spots: Put them in red in your mind, or put them in a box. Recognize them as trouble spots, and be aware of them when you spell the word.

References:

Swaby, Barbara E.R., *Diagnosis and Correction of Reading Difficulties*. Allyn and Baron Boston, 1989.

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WRITING FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES

Once learners have mastered the process of writing, they can begin applying what they've learned to actual writing tasks. In the workplace, common writing responsibilities include taking minutes at meetings; composing memos, reports, and letters; and writing self-, peer-, and employee evaluations. Most people have little formal training in these jobs, and so they logically have a lot of anxieties about doing them. By giving learners a safe, comfortable environment in which to learn, practice, and receive feedback, they are more likely to be able to tackle the writing challenges that they face on the job.

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COMPARISON/CONTRAST PARAGRAPHS

Learning Goals:

- To reaffirm the components of a unified paragraph
- To learn terms which can be used to compare and contrast

Level: ■

Group Size: Any

Time: 20 - 30 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Handout *Paragraph Handout 1*

Learning Activity:

Have the class create a list of words which can be used to compare and contrast. Give them the compare and contrast handout. Have each student use the terms on the handout to write several compare and contrast sentences. Then, have them each write a paragraph comparing/contrasting two items. (e.g. a good movie/a bad movie; a sunny day/a rainy day; Denver/another city, etc.) After completing the paragraph, check for unity and the use of compare/contrast terms.

*** Discussion Questions**

1. What else could you have done to further emphasize the differences/similarities between the two subjects?
2. Was the paragraph unified?

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PARAGRAPH HANDOUT 1

WORDS TO COMPARE:

also, in the same manner, similarly, likewise, at the same time, in the same way

Examples: _____

_____

_____

WORDS TO CONTRAST:

but, however, on the one hand, on the other hand, in contrast, nevertheless, still, even though, on the contrary, yet, although, conversely, rather, whereas, yet

Examples: _____

_____

_____

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PEER AND SELF-EVALUATIONS

Learning Goals:

- To raise awareness of writing for the reader when writing for special purposes
- To identify and analyze the writing culture, particularly as it pertains to the process of writing evaluations
- To recognize that the writing culture changes from company to company and even within departments of a company

Level: ■◆

Group Size: 4 or more students

Time: 1 hour

Preparation and Materials: None

Learning Activity:

As a group, discuss the following:

***Discussion Questions**

1. What is the function of evaluation in this company?
2. Who is the audience?
3. What is the purpose?
4. What level of formality should an evaluation have?
5. What format should you use?
6. What sources of information do you have?
7. How will you document your achievements?
8. How much detail are you expected to have?
9. How honest should you be? Should you only write about the positive, or should you include the negative? How should this be done?

***Variations**

Add or delete questions as is appropriate for the situation.

Remarks:

The evaluation process is common to most companies, but it's a process that can be very intimidating for employees. It may be done by the supervisor, by peers, by the employee himself or herself, or by any combination of these. By analyzing the purpose and audience for an evaluation, the learners develop a better understanding of what the writer must do to persuade and communicate effectively. This process also empowers participants: they become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and consider how they might improve their weaknesses; they also begin to understand that they can impact how they are evaluated by taking a more proactive role in the process.

This discussion should raise awareness of audience and purpose.

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WRITING WITH COMPUTERS

Having a writer use a computer won't in and of itself make the person more articulate. However, once a writer learns to compose on the computer, the process is shortened. The writer is free to move, add, or delete text; quickly access writing tools; and format pages for easier reading. The three components necessary for learning to use the computer for writing are keyboarding skills, writing skills, and computer skills. If the learner is competent in two of these three areas, the third can be taught. However, if the learner only has one of the three--or worse, none--using the computer becomes counterproductive to improving the learner's writing. Because participants often have a wide range of keyboarding, writing, and computer proficiencies, a lab rather than a formal classroom structure works well for giving individualized instruction.

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COMPUTER VOCABULARY

Learning Goals: • To learn vocabulary related to computer usage.

Level: •

Group Size: Any

Time: 15 minutes

Preparation and Materials: Handout *Typing Versus Computer Chart*

Learning Activity:

Have students point to and identify various parts of the computer (e.g. monitor, keyboard, drive, mouse, etc.) Pass out handout with computer terms and vocabulary. Discuss the functions of each component.

*** Discussion Questions**

1. What is the difference between hardware and software?
2. What is specialized language? Are there commonly used computer terms which fail to make sense to the student?

*** Variations** If you have students with different ability levels in the class, have them "think, pair, share" to do some peer teaching and learning.

Remarks: This basic exercise works well to familiarize students with the computer and to make it less intimidating. Works best with students who have had little or no experience with computers.

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Typing and Word-processing Comparison Chart

Typing	Word-processing
1. Writing is permanent (unless you use white-out, etc.)	1. Writing is easily changed.
2. Uses a keyboard	2. Uses a keyboard.
3. Hard to adjust text any way besides left justification.	3. Easy to adjust text in a wide variety of manners.
4. Hard or impossible to create bold, italics or different sized letters.	4. Bold, italics, and multiple sized text is easy to create.
5. Cannot rearrange your words.	5. Can rearrange your words.
6. You end up with one copy.	6. It's easy to make multiple copies and store your work electronically on a disk.
7. You must hit the return key at the end of every line.	7. You only use the return key when you start a new line.

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WRITING WITH COMPUTERS (MEMOS)

Learning Goals:

- To learn proper memo format.
- To determine when to use memos as a form of in-house communication.
- To learn techniques for moving, copying or deleting blocks of marked text.
- To introduce basic text editing concepts.

Level: ■◆

Group Size: Any

Time: 2 hours (45 min. for lecture, 1 hr. 15 min. for practice).

Preparation and Materials:

A place to keep student's work and disks
A memo topic that relates to the student's work experience
A sample document to use as an example
Media to display notes for the class

Learning Activity:

Tell the students to use their word-processing program to write a memo about a topic you have chosen. If they ask for more specific instructions, explain that you will go over the details later in class. Instruct the students to print out their work.

Ask the students to make a class list of what they included in their memos and the style and format they used to create them. Distribute memo handouts after the class discussion has covered a sufficient number of details. Present the information on the handout referring to similarities between the handout and the class' list. Demonstrate how you would make editing notations on the sample memo they created that does not match the format described on the handout. Be sure to ask the students for their suggestions. Instruct the students to follow your example while making notations on their own hard copies.

Begin the computer editing activity by asking the students if they identified instances in their memo drafts where things were in the wrong place. This activity will help the students make necessary changes. Use your sample document to demonstrate the following procedures: copying and pasting (moving) text, cutting and pasting (moving) text, marking and deleting text. Have the students go through each of the above processes using the first sentence of their memo. Duplicate the sentence first. Then carry out the other activities to prevent students from erasing text they may wish to keep. Instruct the students to make the changes listed in their editing notations. When they are

finished, help them save the document with a new name (version number) and instruct the students to print a final copy.

***Discussion Questions**

1. What purpose does a memo serve?
2. What routine information should it contain?
3. What writing style promotes a reader's understanding?
4. When do you think you would rearrange text using cut, copy and paste (move)?
5. What changes did you make to your memo?

***Variations**

You could divide the class into 2 groups. One section could create a draft memo.

Remarks:

Some of the subtleties of teaching this class involve considering the writing abilities and memo writing experience of various students. Some will have no experience with the memo format while others may have written many memos. Obviously, the instructor will have to work on several compositional planes--from teaching the basic layout to achieving an effective, but informal, style.

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